Written Upon The Sands Of Time

Summary

After Halloween, Xander feels like he is losing his mind. When deaths of mysterious origins happen, will he remember what is so familiar about them in time to save those close to him?

Notes

Seriously not betaed. This story was written seven years ago, I've improved vastly since then.

See the end of the work for more notes.
"Bless the Maker and His water.  
Bless the coming and going of Him.  
May His passage cleanse the world.  
May He keep the world for His people."

- Prayer of Shai-Hulud.

"This is great, I think." Xander frowned at the sheet of paper with their list of instructions on it. Principal Snyder had gone to great lengths to make sure they had the worst of the lot, but it was nothing he couldn't handle. Kids were kids, and if they got out of hand, well he knew some Scooby Foo!

Buffy snatched it from his hand and glared at the list of names at the bottom. "This is not great! I had planned something for me and Angel tomorrow night, you know, it being Halloween and no demons out kinda thing. You heard what Giles said about them being quiet."

"Yeah, I was right there, I didn't forget." He thought it best to just agree with her. After the whole 'sacrifice those closest to the master' debacle last month, she was still a little testy. No one wanted to deal with a testy slayer and live.

"Hey, I know this name." Looking up, Buffy pointed at it while showing the list to Willow. "Why do I know this name?"

Willow visibly paled. "That's the kid who lives three doors down from me. The one that likes squirting us with the water hose."

"Oh yeah, I remember him. Shame about that white shirt, Buff." Xander's grin disappeared at the girls' combined glare. Holding up his hands, he backed away from them two steps. "Xander good, vampires bad, remember who's side you're on."

"Some times I wonder." Buffy gave him another lethal glare before turning back to the list. Her eyes caught on the third rule. "Man, this sucks! How am I supposed to get a cool costume that doesn't consist of a sheet or plain old make-up? The dress up thing is for the kids!"

"I dunno, Buffy, it actually sounds kinda fun." Willow seemed to melt at the look her friend gave her. "Okay, so maybe not for you, but Xander and I will like it. It will be just like old times, won't it, Xander?"

Xander tried not to appear too enthusiastic, but he knew he was grinning from ear to ear. This was one of his favorite times of the year. Aside from the being able to go out at night without fear of one's life thing, he got lots of candy and to be able to pretend he was not Xander, boy dud. "Sure, Wills, we're gonna get the best this year. As a matter of fact, I've been working on the plan of attack using the map you got me last summer. With a few modifications, we can still hit the best houses, brats in tow."

Buffy watched him with an air of stunned dismay. "Okay, you are beginning to scare me here."

Willow shook her head and put a hand on Buffy's shoulder. "Don't worry, it gets a lot worse."

"It's official, I am completely freaked."
"Tell me, Willow, does this make me look fat?" Xander held the sumo body suit up in front of himself in the mirror. When he heard her giggling, he shook his head and put the suit back against the rack. He glanced about the new costume shop, sighing at the collection of expensive costumes. Sometimes it really sucked to be on the lower side of middle class. "So, Wills, what are you going to be this year?"

"I don't know, a ghost," she asked hopefully. At his stern look, her smile faded and she glanced away. "I don't know, Xander, I don't really feel comfortable as anything else."

"What are you talking about?" Buffy came up for air from searching the racks of cat costumes and sailor outfits. "I still can't find one that screams 'take me, Angel.'"

"And that's a good thing." Moving over to give her a hand up, Xander pushed a strand of hair from her face. "I was just telling Willow that being a ghost yet again, was not an option. Come on, tell her Buffy, being a ghost is out."

Buffy turned to their friend and nodded. "Sorry, Willow, he's right. As much a classic as it might be, being a Pacman villain is not on the list."

Seeing their resolved expressions, Willow put down the bag she held under her coat. They just weren't very nice anymore. She couldn't understand what was so wrong with being a ghost. It was nice, you could hide who you really were, and it was a tradition. Besides, it was on sale! Waiting until they had turned their backs, Willow picked up the costume again and hid it better.

Xander, having caught her actions in the mirror, shook his head. "Oh well, Rome wasn't built in a day." Giving the racks and shelves of costumes one last look over, he sighed. He moved through the densely packed isles towards the back counter.

The back counter was lined with bargain bins filled with accessories and cheap masks. In the largest of them, just beneath the register, were prepackaged costumes. Inside each bag was a cloth outfit and two accessories. The pirate costume on top had a tag that was in his price range. Just as he was about to pick it up, he was shoved to floor by a mountain of flesh.

"Move out of my way, fag." Larry ignored the shocked looks of the people around them in favor of rummaging through the bin. Not finding one he wanted, he grabbed the one on top and slapped it down on the counter. "Ring it up and make it quick!"

Xander carefully rolled to his hands and knees. Arching up to grab on to something so he could stand, he fell forwards and wrapped his arm around the closest thing. Unfortunately for him, he fell face first in to Larry's ass.

Feeling something grab him from behind, Larry jumped up in shock, freeing himself. He landed on the counter right next to his costume. About to kick Xander in the face, he was surprised to find a hand on his own. Larry followed it back to the owner. "What?"

"The price comes to fifteen dollars and seventy-five cents." Pushing the young man off his counter, Ethan held out one hand. "That is tax included."

"That's a rip, old man." But Larry paid the man in exact change before stomping away with his costume.

Ethan smiled and waved towards the jock. "Thanks for your patronage."

When Xander opened his eyes after the expectant blow never came, he saw he was face down in the costume bin. With a sigh, he grabbed the first bag he saw and slid out. It appeared to be a bundle of
tan rags. Inside were a white dagger and packet he recognized as contacts case. "Cool!" He put the bag down on the counter next to the register and turned to the man who was watching him with a critical eye. "I'll take this one."

Giving a sly grin, Ethan winked at Xander. "A good choice. This one was a special favorite of mine to create."

"You made this?" Xander pulled out his wallet and set the twenty down on the counter. He watched it slip in to the strange man's hand forlornly. There went his last bit of money, but it was either this or let Cordelia turn him in to a Cordette. Hell was a better option.

Ethan handed the bag and change back to Xander. "Yes, I put this outfit together almost magically." He snickered at the expression on Xander's face. "Have you ever heard of the Fedaykin?"

"Sure, but my mom tells me to call them lesbians." Grabbing the bag, Xander turned and headed back through the shop to meet back up with Buffy and Willow.

Shaking his head, Ethan tried not to feel too disappointed. After all, what could one expect from these illiterate Americans? "For heaven's sake, they can't even pronounce the language correctly."

"Neato! That is so the one I want!"

Ethan shuddered. "Bloody hell." One more night, one more and he could get the hell out of this god forsaken country.

Twirling the staff twice, Buffy put it back on the weapon's rack. "Short and blonde, I may be, but lesbian I am not. Besides, if I were to be one, I'd prefer the leather skirt and swords." Picking up the appropriate blade, Buffy hefted it and turned it end over end. "Plastic, I should have known."

Willow dodged the slice Buffy cut through the air with the blade. Standing up again, she grinned wide. "At least it looks real!"

"Still, not the same." Putting up the sword, Buffy sighed. "I don't know, Willow, I just don't see anything I like. Nothing that Angel would like."

Laughing, Willow came up to stand beside her. "So that's what this is about. May be if we went a little towards the more expensive section, you would see what you want."

"May be." Buffy spun to check out the rest of the store. Many of her class mates were already heading for the counter, having been roped in by the troll of a principal for runt watch 97. As if time slowed down just for her, the doors at the back of the shop to the dressing room slowly opened. The dummy clothed in a ladies' gown caught her breath. "I think I found it."

Xander arrived to see his friends moving off like zombies through the racks towards the back of the store. Smiling, he waved a little. "Hey guys."

"Can't talk now, see dress." Buffy waved back at him, heading through the crowd.

Rolling her eyes, Willow grabbed Xander by the arm and dragged him along. She wanted to see this dress as much as Buffy did. Not that she would consider wearing it, but it was pretty.

Xander followed along with no choice but to accept their lead. He began to wonder why he really allowed himself to be pushed around by these two. Sure, they were friends, but at times like this, he didn't really want to be here. For one thing, the dress was ugly to him, a symbol of accepted bondage. Another thing, it was a dress, clothes shopping was definitely not on his list of things to do
before he died.

Buffy stared at it entranced. "It's just like the one in that picture. The one from..." she caught sight of Xander. "The one from the ladies’ of Angel's age."

Xander didn't even bother to respond. She knew how he felt about Dead Boy, it would be pointless to point it out a millionth time. Crossing to the dress, he ran a hand over the sleeve and caught the price tag hanging on the sleeve button. "Well, you had best start selling them slayer scout cookies if you want this one."

"Not really." Smacking his hand away from the dress, Buffy stared at it longingly. "It will put me back a ways, but I got enough to cover it."

"Must be nice," Xander whispered under his breath.

"What was that?" Buffy really didn't pay attention, she was still caught up in the dress.

"I said the dress looks nice." He caught her nod and glanced over towards the counter for the clock. "Look, I got some place I gotta be soon. I'll catch up with you guys later, okay."

"Sure, at the Bronze tonight or tomorrow before school so we can check out our costumes. Remember Snyder said to wear it to school or else." Giggling, Willow tossed Buffy's hair to distract her from the dress.

Xander watch them play back and forth with another sigh. Stuffing his free hand in his pocket, he turned around and headed for the door. On his way passed the counter, he caught the eye of the shop keeper. The guy was cute in that creepy, older guy kinda way. Not that he would tell him or anyone else, it was just an observation.

Ethan smiled at the kid as he passed by with the costume. So he was friends with the air headed slayer, bloody marvelous. This place was turning out to be fun after all.

"God! That is sweet!"

Closing his eyes at the forming headache, Ethan frowned. Damn these kids!

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Sitting at the bar, Xander sipped his gingerale. So he wasn't old enough to have a real drink, didn't bother him none. Right, and the sky was filled with fluffy bears and cutesy hearts. Tonight was just getting more sour by the breath. Speaking of breath, here was old Mr. huffless himself. He caught himself watching Angel with an attention span that bordered on obsession.

At times like this he wished he had laser vision, Dead Boy would be so much ash right now. In his black silk shirt and expensive jeans and easy boots. It made him hard as a rock! Xander fell backwards off his stool at that thought. Glancing up at the frowning bartender, Xander gave a goofy grin and climbed to his feet. "Too much too quick."

"Pace yourself, no one is going to take it from you." Wiping up the mess, the bartender shook his shaved head and walked away.

Sitting back down, Xander picked up his gingerale again. "Smooth, Xander, real smooth."

"What's smooth?"
The sudden voice in his ear had Xander jumping again. This time he spun around, elbow out to catch the person behind him.

Angel easily deflected the blow and caught the boy before he fell from his stool again. "Easy, Xander, just coming to see if you had seen Buffy tonight."

"Back off, tall, dark and ugly!" Xander jerked his arms from the vampire's grip and pushed himself from his chair. The room suddenly seemed too cramped next to the vamp and he picked up his drink. Turning away, he started for the door only to find his way blocked by Angel. "Why don't you do us all a favor and jump on a stake?"

"Why don't you do me a favor and get over your attitude. It's getting really old, Xander. I came over to ask a friendly question, not get my head bitten off." Holding up his hands, he blocked Xander's escape again. "Why don't you do me a favor and get over your confusion about which side you're really on, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Grabbing Xander's hand, he closed his fist around it. Angel noticed the way Xander swallowed at the gesture and enjoyed the fear it inspired. Leaning in close, he whispered in Xander's ear. "That's right, I'd be picking you out of my teeth right about now and looking for your little red headed girl friend. But I'm not that kinda person anymore and you'd better hope I never get that way again."

"Listen to yourself." Xander cleared his throat and took a shaky breath. "You just answered your own question about why I can never trust you. Now if you'll excuse me, I have other more important people to piss off." The strong scent of male cologne and after shave were playing havoc with his inner slut and a part of him wanted to rub his body all over the stronger man.

Stepping back, Angel held up his hands in a familiar gesture of relaxed threat. He caught the insidious scent of the boy's arousal and felt himself respond in kind. A slow smile spread over his face as he looked up from his lowered head. "We'll talk more when you are ready."

"Whatever, I'm outta here." Brushing by the vampire, he leaned over a little to scent the other man one last time and enjoyed the sensation it caused in his body. With a slight smile, be pushed his way through the crowd and headed for the door.

Angel watched him go. He knew their interactions were heading in to dangerous territory for both of them, but it couldn't be stopped. One of these days they would finally come to terms with each other or kill each other in the process. It wasn't until he was spun around to face Buffy he realized time had passed. "Hey."

"Hey." Smiling at her boyfriend, Buffy took a sip of her drink and not so subtly pushed her chest up. "So, like anything you see?"

"I don't know, depends on how much it'll hurt me to answer truthfully."

Xander adjusted the bindings on his costume. There had been more clothes than he had thought in the bag. The costume had been rolled up and stuffed in a pair of cloth boots with wide, soft soles. There was even a hat that looked like something out of an old movie to him. It was made up of an elastic cowl and facial scarf. To complete the outfit was a dark brown cloak with a hood.
After he had assembled the clothes, only his hands and the area around his eyes were bare. He supposed that was where the contacts came in, though, why they were blue was beyond him. How to put them in had taken a call to his cousin and a bottle of visine. Six tries and two sore eyes later he had them in. Not that it mattered to him to complete the outfit, it was a matter of pride after the first two pokes. That and it made him look pretty cool with solid blue eyes.

His boots were also made of elastic around the calves, but there were tiny belts up the side just in case. His jumpsuit stretched tight in some areas and a well placed cup prevented any of the potential gawkers from getting an eyeful. The last thing he needed right now were pictures of his package circulating around school. Not that he had anything to be ashamed of, no, nothing to be ashamed of.

Snorting, he tightened the red hawk crest clasp of the cloak. It was the only piece of metal in the entire suit. That is except what he had assumed was a plastic knife. Upon further inspection had turned up an ivory handle and very real bone knife. If it hadn't been so cool, he would have gone back to the shop for a word with that Ethan fellow. It might have been a mistake and the old man wanted his knife back.

Tucking it in the back of his jumpsuit's waist band, he fluffed out his cape and stood in front of the mirror. Blinking, he smiled at the image it presented, or lack there of. He seemed to stand out in the room, but if went outside, he had no doubt he could hide from the others with the colors of the outfit. Maybe that was what the costume was, an assassin. It would explain the dagger and easy to wear clothes.

Starting to sweat, he adjusted himself through the cup. Then he had to readjust the cup because it settled wrong in the front of his pants. Holding the edge of the cape in front of him, he swished around and headed for the door. The rest of the house was empty, his parents either out drinking again or at work, not that it mattered. He would never live down this at the family reunions. They would probably want to take pictures just to prove it.

He glanced at the clock as he passed the VCR and decided he had time to take the long way to school. He wanted to skulk around the bushes this morning to see if Buffy could spot him on her way. Grabbing his book bag, he headed out of the house and let the door shut behind him.

Xander sat at the library table with a cold compress on his forehead where a large goose egg was developing. He sent a glowing blue glare at Buffy, who was still not talking to him. It wasn't his fault she couldn't take a joke. So he had tried to sneak up behind her and wrap his arms around her shoulders, she didn't have to beat the living shit out of him for it. Okay, so he admitted, it was stupid of him and the outfit did pretty much disguise him.

"Buffy, despite what you may think, there is no race of demons, humans, or shamans that dress the way Xander is. Really, I would have thought I taught you better than this. A simple hit would have been suffice to send him reeling, what you did was uncalled for." Giles took off his glasses and rubbed at his forehead. These children were going to be the death of him very soon.

"He snuck up on me, I thought he was a bad guy. Blame Xander, not me! All I did was defend myself from what I thought was a crazy." Buffy tossed her hair with an air of wounded pride.

"Besides, I already apologized for hitting him five times."

"You hit me twelve times!"

"Yeah, well you deserved those first seven times!" Standing up, Buffy grabbed her books. "I got to get to class or the Snyder will be all over my case. Just stay out of my way for a while Xander, at
least until I have cooled down."

"You won't get any arguments from me." Xander shifted the cowl of his hat to get better access for the ice pack. As she passed by, he flinched away from her. He didn't see the hurt look in her eye and wouldn't have cared, she beat him, not the other way around.

After the doors had closed behind her, Giles tossed his glasses to the table and turned on Xander. "How could you be so stupid? She is a killer, to her it would have been no imposition to terminate your existence and not think twice."

"Sorry, Giles, I just thought to give her a little Halloween spook. She just looked so funny in that outfit and I thought it was a good idea at the time." He winced at the stinging of the ice as he resettled in the chair. "Then again, I guess I wasn't thinking either."

"Hind sight." He watched the young man with a critical eye. "Just what exactly are you supposed to be?"

"An assassin I think, the man who sold it to me asked me if I knew what a Fey Dyke was." Giving a shrug, he removed the cold pack and set it on the table. "Well, I guess I better get to class or Buffy won't be the only one after my blood."

"Again, I am dreadfully sorry she attacked you. I will have a more thorough discussion with her this evening before your Halloweening. Now off you go." Taking a seat at the table, Giles picked up his glasses and started flipping through his books.

Xander watched him for a minute before adjusting his cowl back over his head and tightening the hat in place. The hood came last and he blinked twice. In the dark recess of the library, his contacts glowed making the world neon blue. "Cool."

Giles glanced up and took a second look at the boy in front of him. "Yes, cool. Now get to class." He would never admit it, but the blue eyes did creep even him out. It was understandable why Buffy over reacted. Understandable, but not so easily dismissed.

Xander folded his cloak over one arm, wrapped it about his waist and bowed out of the library. He stood once more as he entered the school hall. Like him, there were several people in costumes walking the halls, most were in generic witch or goth type outfits. One boy reminded him so much of Dead Boy that he felt himself growing stiff in his cup. Clearing his throat, he let the cloak cover his entire body and moved through the students.

His dark hood allowed the contacts to continue glowing and many students gave him a wide berth. Xander smiled beneath his facial scarf and walked to his first class. The teacher had to look three times before realizing it was him in his seat and not someone else. By the time the first period class was over, Xander was nearly ready to burst from suppressed laughter. Several times the teacher had simply stopped because Xander was staring right at her.

Grabbing his book, he held it under the cloak and stood up. The other students spread out of his way as he exited the class. It was good to be scary, he was beginning to understand the appeal of being evil. Of course being Evil sucked.

The walk to his next class was even more fun than the first. So long as he held himself straight up and moved like he wasn't really here, people avoided him. In a day where getting hit and shoved around at least ten times by first period, this was a welcome relief. The class went much smoother than the first, the teacher simply choosing to ignore the students completely.
When the class was over and the teacher turned to face the students to tell them they could go, he shrieked at the sight of Xander sitting front row and center. Clutching his chest, he fell back against his desk and waved them out. He nearly threw himself over the desk as Xander stood up and walked out passed him.

Third period was his study hall and for fun, Xander sat in the back of the auditorium. For the first time in its existence, not one person sat in the back. Xander just sat there and enjoyed staring at people until they flinched away. About halfway through the class, he noticed that his eyes started to lose the blue glow. Figuring they were like any glow in the dark toy, he lifted his hood so they could be exposed to light.

The reaction was immediate. Several people fell from their chairs scrambling to get away from him. The sudden smell of piss filled the room and Johnathan fled, saying something about a bathroom break.

Reaching up to unbuckle the mask from over his face, Xander stretched his jaw and yawned. He sat back and stretched his arms over his head in a relaxed pose. The rest of the period was spent chuckling to himself at the angry expressions on the class’ face.

When the class was over, Xander decided to skip the next period and headed for the library. By now his contacts had gotten enough light that he could wear the hood again. Walking out, he reattached the cloth flap over his mouth and pulled down the hood. Again, they cleared the way for him and he made it to the library without incident.

As the doors opened for him, he looked up at the sound of a book dropping and someone screaming. Glancing about for the bad guy, he didn't find the thing that had scared Willow. He pulled the dagger from his belt just in case and ran to protect her from whatever it was. When she screamed louder and threw a book at him, he ducked to the side and figured it out. "Willow! It's me, Xander!"

Willow dropped the next book she had picked up toss at him to the table and held herself. "Xander? Is that really you?"

"Yeah, Wills, it is." Pulling back the hood, he stripped off the hat and exposed his head. "See, it's just the costume I got yesterday."

"That wasn't funny, Xander! You scared me!" Wiping away the tears, Willow looked away. "What are you supposed to be anyways?"

"Some sorta assassin, the costume guy said it was a fey dyke gun or something." Putting his dagger back in the sheath, he crossed the little space that separated them and pulled Willow in to his arms. Rubbing her back, he held her close. "Sorry about that, I didn't know you were in here. Giles already knew about the costume and I just assumed he would be the only one in here."

Nodding, Willow continued to rub at her eyes. She was still a little shaken and Xander hugs weren't enough to completely dispell the fear. "Well, yeah, I guess. But he isn't, I am! And you scared the heck out of me! I thought you were one of them bad guys Buffy fights trying to come after me. And when you drew the dagger, whoa, scary! I thought for sure I was gonna die, but then I thought, 'what would Buffy do' and so I threw the books. Hey, enough with the grabby hands already."

Freezing, Xander opened his eyes, having gotten lost in rubbing her back. He squeezed her back a little before letting go and smiling. "So, you feeling better now?"

"Yeah, I guess." Having had enough of crying, she focused on her outrage. Crossing her arms, she sat back in the chair. "You think that Willow groping is okay, Mister?"
"Well, more than okay, but so, so wrong." Smiling, Xander replaced the cowl of his outfit, but left the face flap and hood undone. Standing back, he tried to offer her his best contrite expression but only ended up dissolving in a fit of giggles with her. "Sorry, but it had to be a once in a life time chance and who am I to pass up fate?"

Smirking, Willow slapped him on the arm. "Don't do that ever again. At least not without my permission." She knew that it probably never would, despite how much it felt like a good idea. Xander just didn't seem to be interested enough in her to do more than cop the occasional feel. More was the pity in her opinion.

"Okay, okay, I get it." Standing at a distance, he scanned the library for any sign of Giles. "So, what are you in here for?"

"My halloween outfit made the teacher uncomfortable, she said there was no place for a slut in her class. Personally, I think she was disappointed I looked like Cordelia's fluff heads. Anyways, it's all Buffy's fault, I wanted to be a ghost." Gesturing at the large trench coat she wore over her clothes, she started to undo the buttons. At the hungry look on his face, she thought twice and rebuttoned the two top clothes. "Um, on second thought, you can just take my word for it."

Sighing in disappointment, Xander gave one last forlorn look at her body then turned back to her face. "So, Giles lend you his over coat?"

"Nope, I wore this to school, I'm not stupid. Wearing this while walking down the street would have all those perverts staring at me." She picked up a book from the table and started to flip through the pages. Finding it the wrong book, she frowned and set it down. "Xander, since you caused this, would you please get the books I threw at you?"

About to protest, he caught her look and sighed. "Fine." He turned around and went over to pick the books up. Just as he reached them, the doors opened and slammed him in the head. "Son of a bitch!" Holding his head, he jumped up. "Who the hell did that?"

"Well pardon, Xander, but this is my place of business. May I ask what you are doing here? I thought you had class to attend this hour." Giles, arms full of books, brushed passed the curing boy. After he reached the table Willow was sitting at, he dropped the books and dusted off his jacket. "This is the last of them."

"Thanks, Giles, I'll get right on cataloging them." After speaking, she turned back to Xander expectantly. "I'm waiting."

"Keep your trench coat on, Vixen, I'm not quite through curing what G-man hurt yet!" Xander continued to rub at his head, but picked up the books anyways. With a put upon sigh, he slowly dragged his heels towards her. He dropped the books and fell in to a chair next to her. When he leaned over to rest his head on her shoulder, he gave a deep sigh. "I am so abused, you use me then toss me away."

"That's me, Willow the man eater." Pushing his head off, she shrugged in the coat and opened the books. Flipping through the pages, she sighed. "Another Dungeons and Dragons tome. Giles, who did you order these from?"

"Hmmm? Oh, they came from the Council, they were part of Merric's collection." Back to them, he knew from experience what their expressions were. "He was Buffy's first Watcher. Quite the Orc, he was, I am told."

Xander and Willow shared an expression then turned back to the books.
Giving in to the need, Xander stuffed his hand down the front of his suit and scratched at himself under the cup. The tight plastic protector had been bothering him since lunch. Sitting in the library with no air conditioner had been like pouring itching powder in there. However, that was nothing compared to the oven he now found himself in.

Meeting in the gym to take the little bastards out was the evil idea of Darth Snyder. The little man knew the air was out even in here and was deriving great pleasure from it. Xander just had to figure out a way to make Buffy see it was part of his evil plots and slay him. Then again, she was the one in the seven hundred layers of petty coats and bustles that made it even worse. May be his job would be done for him.

Grinding his teeth at the constant wall of sound coming from the kids, he turned on them and stared. The sudden silence of his group was almost painful. Never underestimate the value of a good costume. Drawing his cloak about him, he turned around and headed for the door. Forget Snyder and his little rules.

Behind him, Xander could hear the marching of the troops. It took him a moment to realize there were more than just his kids and he glanced over his shoulder to see Willow's and Buffy's group following behind, neither girl to be seen. Stopping, he headed back for the kids and waved them to stay put. "Where are your leaders?"

The kids stared amongst themselves for a bit. Having decided who would be their spokes person, they shoved the youngest of them forward. The seven year-old glanced up at Xander and shivered. His molded plastic Gargoyle face trembled as he pointed back the way they had come.

Sighing, Xander nodded and turned back towards the street. Looking both ways at the cross walk, he gestured for them to follow behind him. If Buffy and Willow were going to leave him to it, then he was going to do his job then make them suffer later.

The troops followed after him, leery of their guardian, but excited that they were the first group to head for the trick-or-treating. The first street they came to was empty except for the porch lights. They were about to spread out again when Xander appeared in front of them.

"All right, troops, here is the game strategy. We are going to get the maximum amount of candy in the least amount of time. You are going to follow my instructions to the letter and we will all go home with full bags." Waiting for their nods, he clapped his hands together and spread them to encompass the group. "So here is what we will do. Since there are twenty of you, you will divide in to groups of five. Groups one and three will start at one end of the street on opposite sides and work their way down. Two and four will start the opposite ends on opposite sides and work their way back. When you complete this strategy, you will switch sides and go at it thus hitting both sides.

"If you spot a person giving out things that aren't candy, warn the others with a puking sound and we will avoid that house. The team that forgets this critical rule will give up three candy bars each to the community bag. The community bag is mine, which I will be separating among the group at the end of tonight." He shook his hand and a bag suddenly unfolded from it causing the kids to laugh. "Remember to say trick-or-treat and to thank the people who give you candy. No pushing or shoving, there is plenty for all. If you can't be nice, you will give five candy bars for every time you are mean. Any questions?"

At the nervous twitters the group gave him, Xander nodded. "All right, you five are group one. You five are group two." Pointing at the kids, he gestured towards which side of the street they were supposed to go on. "Group three, and group four. When you have gone through both sides of the
street, meet back up here and we will hit the next block. Let's be quick about this, remember there is a whole town out there waiting and we only have two hours! Now go get them!"

With a round of cheers, the kids split up in their groups and headed off in the right directions.

Xander pretended to wipe the a tear from his eye as he watched the carefully. Twenty kids and he was the only adult, man would that have been fun when he was their age. Now it just seemed like such a waste. The last rays of the sun going down had him turning to it and bidding fair well. Tonight would be about just tonight, no problems, no demons, no Harkonnens.

Paul Atreides glanced about him in question. The world around him was completely wrong, so much different than the place he had left behind in his attempt to become that which could be in many places at once. Where should be dark caves and hydroseals were open spaces and green stuffs.

Being so exposed in this place left him uneasy. He quickly searched up and down the street for any sign of his Fedaykin. The feeling of strangeness increased and he gripped the crysknife at his waist. Before he could get his bearings, a pack of five deformed creatures headed his way shrieking. Waiting until they were close enough to be upon him with a great leap, he continued to observe them before jumping out of the way. His muscles tensed and he shot up above them. Finding his passage skywards blocked, he slashed out quickly with the blade and cut his way in to the tree. The little mutations clawed at his tree like a pack of hunting hounds and he glared at them.

"May the Maker take you all!" Tensing his muscles in the ingrained fashion of his Prana-Bindu training, Paul stomped down on the largest of branches under him and sent them crashing to the ground. Several of the mutations were pinned under the branches and he leapt down to inspect them further. One of them who had managed to escape the branch charged at Paul, claws fully extended. It had all of thirty seconds before it found its horns removed and a dagger at its throat. Blinking, it stared up at him.

"I suggest you make a fast retreat, whatever you may be, before I get angry." Nodding at the mutation, he took a step back and held the knife from its view. Any off worlder who saw the blade must be cleansed. No sooner had he backed off from the mutation than he was again besieged by another group of them. This time there were more.

Right then and there, Paul decided he did not care for this strange world. Summoning the strength of his body, he did a back flip over the pint sized crowd of mutations and made a break for the nearest high ground. He needed to get up if he were to see the lay of this world. A leap up on top of a set of steps, off a planter, then on top of a roof covered in sandy paper.

All around him he saw the people of this world running and screaming being chased by the mutations. Others were holding them off from a siege at their very doors. Whatever these diminutive mutations were, they could not be organized beyond small groups. Perhaps there were as mindless as hunting hounds lacking a master's controlling hand.

With that in mind, he started searching for the bastard Harkonnen who was surely responsible for this entire debacle. However, his searches turned up no blue uniforms of his enemy. Then it would seem that this place was not a fabrication of his demented grand father's mind. He instantly ruled out the Bene Gesserit and Space Guild.

That left only one other conclusion. He was still back in the cave physically, while his mind wondered through a Melange induced trance. The water of life must have been too much for his
body to handle at once. It would take time and a little mental effort, but he would be able to process the toxin and change it.

In the meantime, he would have to explore this strange world and hope that what happened here did not affect him. Just in case, he thought it best to avoid contact with those that could harm him.

A gathering of the mutations drew his attention. They were assembling around a couple, a man with white hair in a black coat and a woman with black hair in a white dress. Around them stood mutations of all shapes and sizes.

"So their masters have arrived after all." Hand on the hilt of his crysknife, Paul narrowed his blue on blue eyes. He was about to jump from the roof when a vision hit him. Sliding to the edge of the roof, he held his head as the other sense filled his mind.

He could see them all, thousands of people, millions of them, almost billions, around this world. They were mindless to the world around them, the darkness that bled through it all like a corruption. Their combined ignorance overwhelmed their survival instincts. How so many could be blinded to the truth was beyond him.

However, among the darkness, he felt presence burning bright enough to turn it all to ash. He could see how these beings had conspired in a plan, an existence towards a goal in tune with the darkness. Each time one would pop up in existence, the darkness would over come another.

In his mind it played out like candles on a windy night. The minders each in turn lighting new ones as the old ones burned out. He stood above it all, he saw the pattern in which the candles were placed. He knew from where the winds were coming to blow them out, which ones would never even get lit.

Suddenly they stopped. The minders stopped in their actions and the winds froze. He felt more than saw them turn towards him. At the center of their attention he closed himself off to all probes. The action had immediate effects and he was back in himself.

Glancing down at the people on the streets below, Paul knew each of them as if from birth. He also knew what they were going to do, how it would effect them and when they would all die. This place wasn't meant to be for him. This was all on the actions of one who delighted in messing up the plans of others. "Gurney man, it seems your like in this world has a wicked humor."

"Is that some sort of kid slang these days?"

Paul glanced down with narrowed eyes at the figure standing at the front steps of the house he was sitting on. His state of dress was unlike anything he had ever seen before. Judging from the array of clothes, he was slackened; one who would could not be fully trusted or relied upon. However, a sense of the man made him more than he appeared, reminding Paul of his vision of the candles.

"What do you want?"

"I was kinda hoping you would be the one answering that question, only in reverse. Seems you ruffled a few feathers when you peeked in on them and they sent me to find out what you are." When the glowing blue eyes only continued to stare at him, Whistler scratched his neck. "You know, if you are just going to sit there, can you come down here and do it? This is kinda not a good position for my neck if you know what I mean."

Launching himself from the roof, Paul tumbled end over end until he landed in a crouch behind the balance demon. Crysknife drawn and against his throat, Paul smiled. "Is this more to your liking?"
"Oh yeah, I love it when you shadowy types threaten my existence. As a matter of fact, I don't consider it a successful mission without at least one death threat." Whistler swallowed as the blade nicked his neck. Holding up his hands, he back peddled to keep his neck from being cut. "Okay, okay! My bosses want to know who you are and what you are doing."

Paul didn't know whether to trust his truth sense or not as they said he wasn't lying. Deciding to give it a chance, he released the short man and took a step back. However, he kept the knife within easy access if the stranger need be eliminated. Where he knew these people from the vision, this person in front of him was a complete mystery.

After a time, Whistler turned to look at the stranger, still holding his throat. "Silent and broody, you remind me of someone I met before."

"I am unlike anything in your existence. Even among my own people I am a freak." Taking a menacing step towards Whistler, Paul enlarged his size with aid of the cloak. Tactics learned over a life time came to be second nature to him now. Fear being the best motivation, he was not above using scare tactics.

Holding up his hands, Whistler took a step back. "So you don't want to answer the questions, okay. Just what are you planning?" He wasn't liking this guy much and it was starting to look very bad on him.

Giving the guy one last look, Paul searched him for any sign he could be of any use. Being stuck on an alien world filled with beings that seemed so bent on destruction was nothing new to him. He had survived then, he would survive now. Stepping back, his body seemed to shiver and he disappeared from sight. An old trick taught him by his mother years ago.

Whistler glanced about him hurriedly trying to locate the stranger. Unable to locate him even with his senses, he knew this couldn't be good. "The big guys aren't going to care much for this."

Half a mile away, Paul collapsed to his knees in exhaustion. The weirding ways as the Fremen called them took a lot out of him, even after having used them all his life. Now that the others knew what he looked like in his present state, he needed a new disguise.

He was sitting between a grouping of bushes and a house. Hearing people talking, he pushed his way through the bushes to get a better sounding on them. The words sounded familiar, but the dialect was unusual.

"God, Buffy, are you all right?" Willow stood above her panicking friend in shock. So she had passed through a fence instead of around it, she was a ghost! There was no excuse for this Elizabeth girl to go all crazy on her. "Did you hit yourself on the gate? I told you I could go through it, not you."

"You... you're a ghost!" The brunette pointed at Willow and shrieked.

Ducking back behind the bushes, Paul shook his head and decided this place was not a good location to hide. If the fools of this world were as dim witted as the girl on the ground, it would be harder to pass off. He decided that he had rested enough and made his for away from the girls. This brought him to a gated yard and he quickly hopped over it.

Hanging in the back were what he assumed someone's forgotten wash. He could vaguely remember people doing this on Caladan when he lived there, when water was everywhere. Apparently it wasn't so precious on this world so it must have vast oceans like his... former home world. He looked down at himself and grabbed the clothes that most resembled him in size.
It wasn't much, just a pair of pants that buttoned up and a shirt with no sleeves. That meant he would need to keep his boots but the rest could go. Grabbing a sheet from the line, he spread it out on the ground and stripped off on it. He dropped the still suit and cloak in the center of the sheet and bundled them up.

Standing there unabashedly naked, he examined the pants before putting them on. They were uncomfortably snug around the crotch and took a little finessing to button up on his hips. Next came the shirt. It too was tight, but he stretched it over his body and glanced down. It stopped just above his navel and made it seem incomplete. Sighing, Paul put on his weapon's belt through the loops of the pants and hung the crysknife at his hip, having no room in his clothes for it.

After pulling on his boots over the pants, he crawled over to the sheet and tied up the corners tightly. Standing up, he carried his bundle back to the fence and jumped it without even touching it. This time he made his way to the street casually glancing about him. The girls were gone and a group of quickly moving men in flashy clothes had taken their place.

One of the men spotted Paul and signaled his charge with a wave of his sword. "Get him!"

Turning on them, Paul glared and reached for the crysknife with one hand.

"It be a blue eyed demon, lads! Cross yourselves and pray for your souls, we kill ourselves a demon!" The leader held up his crucifix and kissed the icon before picking up the charge.

"Damn!" He had forgotten about what the melange addiction did to one's eyes. Deciding it did him best to avoid conflict when able, Paul turned on heel and made a run for it. Paul quickly out distanced the strange men but didn't slow down until he found himself in a location he hadn't seen from his perch. There were larger buildings around but more people.

Keeping his head low, Paul scrunched his eyes until they were barely open to hide himself. He needed a pair of dark glass eye shadings fast! Risking a glance about, he decided this place was the local market place and might have what he needed. After a few shops turned up nothing, he found what he was looking for across the street.

The only problem was the three, as impossible it was to believe, dead mutations breaking in to the front window. Pulling his crysknife, Paul headed for the mutations. He tossed his still suit at one while he stabbed another through the chest. The stabbing only seemed to make it mad. Groaning, Paul jerked out his knife and kicked the mutation with all his strength, sending it flying across the street.

By now, the other two had recovered from their shock and being hit by the bundle, respectively. The larger vampire started towards Paul growling only to find his head suddenly facing the wrong way. Paul landed from the round house and kicked the broken necked vampire towards his friend across the street. Flipping his knife, Paul brought it down in a sweeping arc to slit the throat and chest of the third vampire open. Grabbing the heart on a hunch, he jerked it from the vampire and watched it turn to dust. "So that is how you kill them."

He glanced about to search the streets for more of them only to find the entire street empty. Shrugging, Paul turned back to the window and grabbed the eye shadings. He tested the first pair that struck his fancy and frowned when they cracked. Apparently they were a plastic, not glass like he had expected.

Ransacking the entire collection, he found only one pair of metal framed ones that were dark enough to hide his eyes and fit. No sooner than he had put them on, than a vehicle round the corner with lights flashing and sirens blaring. He bent down, grabbed up his still suit, and shot up in a jump to
grab the sign over the shop. Swinging around the bar one handed, he flew up to land on top of the adjacent building.

Paul left the men in uniforms gaping as he sped across the roofs away from the crime scene. When he ran out of roofs, he stopped at the edge of a roof and glanced about. There was a land transport still operating outside the door of this building, the hatch left open. He decided if he wanted to get away from this city so he could have time to think out his next moves, it would probably be his best option.

Jumping from the roof, he didn't see the door opening below him until he had crashed in to the figure that was running out it.

"Oh bloody hell! Watch where you are going, you ass!" Ethan rolled to his knees cupping his ribs. Glancing up to see who had crashed in to him, he smiled at the boy. "Well hello, having a good time, Fedaykin?" Before he knew it, Ethan found himself pressed up against the building with a crysknife to his throat. "Oh yes, seems I forgot about that part."

"Harkonnen," Paul hissed with as much hate as humanly possible. Putting his tone in a high pitch, he spoke with the voice. "Is this your doing, foul beast?"

Ethan found himself nodding before he even registered what had happened. "I am the one."

"Then I shall take your water in the name of my father!" Drawing the blade back, he prepared to drive it in to the man's gut. Just as his hand moved to insert the blade, a blinding pain filled his mind and Xander shrieked in pain. Stumbling back, he clutched his head with a free hand and the blade.

Seeing his exit, Ethan slipped passed the boy and on towards Rupert's car. Apparently he had made a slight miscalculation in the spell. Not getting the warrior, he had brought their god to this world. A bit of nastiness that he hoped the boy would later think long and hard about. Sliding behind the wheel, he sent a last look towards the boy and smiled. It had been worth it he decided.

Xander continued to clutch his head and close his eyes from the pain. Images, thoughts, and knowledge flooded his mind like watching a pink floyd video. He cried out, begging it all to stop. Eyes watering from the pain, he shook his head and scooted back trying to avoid more. "Please, I don't want it. Please!"

A cool hand touched his face, tilting him to look up. Xander latched on to the memory of this one person and held tight. Another wave of pain slammed through his head and he screamed. When it was over he looked up at Angel again, blood running from his nose. "It hurts. Please, make it stop."

"I will." Angel waited until Xander had closed his eyes before cutting off the circulation to his brain. When he was certain Xander had passed out, he let go.

"What on Earth do you think you are doing?" Giles, having come out of the Ethan's in time to see Angel let go, reached for the stake in his jacket. "Step away from him, before I send you to hell."

"You have no idea how much pain he was in." Picking up the boy, Angel shouldered him and faced the Watcher. "He asked me to stop it and I obliged."

"Killing him was not..." Giles was cut off by the vampire's gesture.

"He is not dead. However, he will have one hell of a headache when he wakes up." Adjusting Xander's weight, Angel looked behind Giles to the empty shop. "Was it you who broke the spell? Buffy and I weren't too far away and she sent me to find you while she dealt with Spike."
"Spike? Good Lord!" Now it was Giles' turn to glance about. "Where is she?"

Angel grit his teeth. "I said she stayed behind. I trust her to deal with him. After he lost his army of demons, she had the upper hand. Look, you have a car around here? We have to get him to a hospital."

"Oh, yes, it's... right here?" Giles looked to where his car had been.

From down the block, Whistler watched the trio and shook his head. Lowering his hat, he gave a humorless laugh. "Good luck, kid, you're gonna need it."
"Deep in the human unconscious, 
is a pervasive need for a logical universe, 
that makes sense. But the real universe, 
is always one step beyond logic."
-from *The Sayings of Muad'Dib*

Waking up in the hospital was not what Xander considered the results of a good time. If whatever happened as result of that little troll Snyder, he was going to have himself a good old fashioned lynching. Running a hand down his face, he felt the painful tug of an IV in his arm and grimaced. Great, so he had been out long enough for them to stick it to him.

There was no one else in the room that he could see and that made it easier for him to escape. Sitting up, he winced at the vertigo induced headache. So much for doing things the easy way. It took him a minute to stabilize himself before he could slide to the edge of the bed and hang his feet off. When he did, he noticed the lack of real clothes and frowned.

Someone had removed his stillsuit.

Frowning, Xander eased himself off the bed. It was a short walk to the closet and there he found the costume and a pair of clothes that definitely weren't his. Sighing with relief, he removed the hospital gown and grabbed the hanger his costume was on. He pulled it off and slid it on slowly. The vertigo made him lean against the door as he pulled it on. The cup was nowhere to be found, but otherwise it was all there.

It didn't occur to Xander until he had strapped the mask in to place that he had felt uncomfortable without it on. Strange and embarrassing were the exact feelings. Almost like the time six months ago when he was in school without clothes on due to Ryan's dreams.

Xander shuddered in memory.

The costume in place, he felt more at ease. Only one thing still nagged on his mind, his crysknife was missing. Feeling anger that anyone would dare strip him of such an important possession, he started for the door.

A wave of vertigo sent him crashing against the wall halfway to the door. "Damn it!" He grabbed for the handle and used it to steady himself. Once there, he turned the latch and opened the door. The moment he did, a wall of sound hit him.

Women were screaming, children crying, and people of all ages were raising their voices. Apparently they had something to worry about. In the clamor to be noticed by the staff, Xander slipped through the crowd and headed for the exit. However, he wasn't so fortunate.

At the double doors leading to entrance number three, Xander's arm was grabbed in a punishing grip. He was jerked back to the hard body of someone and a cold hand placed over his lips. Whoever had him pulled him to the shrubbery to hide them.

Xander drove his free arm into the chest of the vampire, knocking him back in to the wall. Unfortunately for him, the vampire had him in a tight grip and held on, so they both went backwards. Xander impacted in to the chest of the vampire. This time both arms tightened around him.
"Calm down, Xander, it is just me," Angel whispered against his ear, tightening his lock on the boy. Holding him close, he ducked down as more people came in through the entrance. "There are a lot of people here, they don't particularly care who you are if it gets the blame off them."

"I can handle myself, Deadboy. Now let go!" Elbowing the vampire again, he pushed himself up and broke free. His body shot up so fast he slammed in to the bushes in front of them. Grabbing on to it, he steadied himself and the topsy plant. "Whoa, where'd that come from?"

Unfortunately for him, his actions and voice alerted a group of parents bringing in their crying kid to his presence. A father launched himself at the bushes with a war cry.

Hearing the battle cry, Xander's eyes went wide and he jumped up hoping the man would crash low. Again he over shot his goal and the plant. It wasn't how he jumped so high that worried Xander, it was the coming down as he crashed landed in the middle of the crowd. This time fate seemed to be on his side and he landed in a ready crouch. Not waiting to see what else he could do, he took off as fast as he could through the open doors.

His speed had also increased he noted as he out sped an ambulance on its way out of the parking lot. "Huh, well isn't that neat?" After a bit, he started to grow tired and had to slow down. By now he was halfway home.

Which reminded him, he had been in the hospital. His parents had been notified. Which meant he was dead meat if he didn't get back there quick. He would, once he changed. Glancing down at his body and the skin tight costume, he was sure that wasn't quite the image he wanted to show off. With that decided, he jogged at a more reasonable pace to get home.

After rounding the corner of his block, he came to a halt. His front porch light was on and his father's station wagon was in the drive way. That meant two things, his parents were home, and were passed out early. They weren't even aware he had been at the hospital. Usually that would have been just another sign of how much life sucked at times, but tonight it was a disguised blessing.

There would be no need to return to the hospital, no need to explain how he ended up there in the first place to his parents. And if he was really lucky, there would be no record of who he was, just a John Doe. That was if he was really lucky.

Sighing, Xander made his way up the street to his home. In the distance he could hear the sounds of cars and police cruisers. Tonight was just like any other night in SunnyDale. G-man was so wrong and Xander was going to enjoy rubbing that little fact in tomorrow.

At his house, he opened the door quietly and slipped inside. The house was never locked despite the danger. Inside, he glanced in the living room and found his father where he knew he would, passed out in the lazy-boy, supper chilled on the TV tray by his side. His father was always busting his ass at the construction site and Xander swore to himself that no matter how bad it got, he would never do it.

His mother was probably in her bed asleep still dressed in her waitress uniform and shoes at the edge of the bed. Glancing in the kitchen, he saw the boxes that had housed the TV Dinner. Sighing, he cleaned up the mess and turned off the over head light. Walking back in the living room, he turned off the TV and end table lamp. After throwing a blanket over his father, he headed up stairs for bed.

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Morning came too soon in his opinion. Blinking, Xander ran a hand over his face to wipe away the build up and dried drool. It bothered him that his skin felt more oily than usual. Shaking it off, he
climbed out of bed and headed for the shower.

In the bathroom he got a good look at his appearance. The world seemed strange around him and he noticed that he looked soft. Touching his face, he examined the flesh. "Water fat." The age old curse of the Fremen for those who took for granted the blessing of water.

Smiling, he headed for the shower. So much water on this planet, so much to use and enjoy. Today he felt like luxuriating in the feel of water on his body. It had been so long since he could do so without feeling guilty about the waste that he almost couldn't bring himself to do it.

Almost.

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He was sitting in fourth period when he felt it.

Coming in early to school he had missed both Buffy and Willow, much to his relief. Xander couldn't handle their questions after friday night. He wasn't actually aware of that previous evening's events, just that they left him a little jumpy, and faster for a time. Whatever had happened, the effects had worn off while he slept. He tried running this morning and all he could manage was his normal speed.

Deciding that it was probably best that whatever it was that had happened to him wore off, he tried putting it out of his mind. However, now when he tried to think of other things, it always kept drawing him back to halloween night. By the time third period had rolled around, he was ready to make a deal with the devil to remember.

Thinking it best not to make such thoughts, he focused on the paper in his hand. It was about the difference between squid and octopi. The only difference was the placement of the legs. How hard was that to figure out?

It started out as a niggling at the back of his neck. He scratched it and continued on with his work. The octopus had eight legs of equal length while the squid didn't. Xander rubbed at the itch again and frowned. The squid was to the octopus as the chimp was to the human.

The itch increased and he snapped. Twisting around, he raised his hand to slap at whoever was rubbing something against his head only to find he was the last person in the row. He smiled to dispell the looks the others were giving him and turned back to his paper.

Xander eyed them as he faced the desk. It wasn't like this was the first time anything weird happened around here, just that they seemed to take great pleasure when it happened to him. He was about to burn a little at them when he felt the feeling again.

This time a definite vibration could be felt at the back of his head. The sensation ran up through his skull to his inner ear. A sudden pain had him clutching his head and clicking his jaw to defer the pressure. Stretching his jaw bone down, he made over biting motions. When he opened his eyes, he found the teacher glaring at him. He let go of his head and smiled at her. "Sorry, pressure build up."

"If you wish to look like a fool, do it on your own time, not in my class." Giving him an evil eye, she headed back towards the front of her class.

Xander felt like a complete moron. The class was still looking at him and snickering. He glanced up at the clock and sighed. Twenty minutes until lunch. He would have to rush if he was going to avoid the Buffinator and Willow Wisp. Not that he wanted to avoid them, it just, well, he wanted to avoid speaking about last night.
Plus, he was still angry at them for leaving their groups with him. He should never have had to deal with them runts all by himself. There was the undisclosed fact that he was also ticked there was no candy from halloween on top of it all. A sweet tooth didn't feed itself.

Life in Sunnyhell was so unfair sometimes. There was just something about being on the mouth to hell that really sucked. Of course it could be the mouth itself, more than probably. Fuming, he slumped in his seat and put the paper away. It was best to just wait and finish it later.

Glancing up at the clock, he rubbed at the back of his neck. The tingling sensation was still there, only he was slowly becoming accustomed to it. He figured whatever was would go away on its own. Probably the beginning of a really nasty cold. He had one a few years back that had him kissing floor every time he tried to stand.

That was indeed a nasty one and it appeared this would be a replay. Groaning, he lowered his head and tried to get some rest. The teacher wouldn't care, and if she did, so what? Dr. Yueh was a scarier teacher than Mrs. Plimpleton.

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The lunch line felt longer than usual today. By now Xander was feeling extremely run down and irritable. Any time someone even brushed against him, he snapped and nearly attacked. There was something off about him today and he couldn't figure out what it was. That is until he caught the first whiff of the special offering on the menu.

Mouth watering with a craving he had never known before, Xander pushed his way through the line to grab the source of his mindless search. He was halfway through with the fist sized cinnamon roll before he realized that people were staring. He didn't care. Loading his plate up with them, he threw a five at the lunch lady and rushed to a far corner.

Once seated, he quickly sucked down the rest of the roll with many moans of satisfaction. Grabbing the next one, he pressed his nose in the center of it. He inhaled the scent of it and felt a calm settle over him so dramatically is caused him to shiver. Eyes closed, he sat there enjoying the smell for a few minutes. A single word slowly rolled off his lips, "spice."

Half blissed out, he opened his dazed eyes to see that he was the center of attention for five tables. A grin flitted across his face as he giggled. Feeling the gooey icing melting on his fingers, he bit into the roll. He moaned some more, enjoying each bite until the roll was gone. Xander finished off the last three in quick order, not taking the time to anything except satisfy the craving. When they were all gone, he licked the plate clean of all remains.

After that was gone, he finally allowed himself to relax and digest. The nagging feeling of unease had all but evaporated. He reached up to cover his mouth as he released a belch. The scent hit his nose and something inside him flared, a half buried memory. "The spice is life."

Standing up, Xander grabbed his tray and headed for the kitchen drop point. Once there, he put the tray in the window and smiled at the lunch lady. "They were very good." Still smiling from the cinnamon roll, he absently thought he probably looked high. Didn't matter, the pain was gone and all was right in Xander World once more. He waved on his way passed the lunch lady at the meal line.

All in all, he supposed he had spent less than three minutes in the cafeteria. A new personal best. He headed for the auditorium to finish sleeping off his nap from the previous period.

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"You should have seen it, Giles. The way he attacked them, you'd think he was having a major case of the munchies. And then how he ate them, it was just plain obscene! Who knew Cinnamon Rolls were such a turn on?" Buffy shook her head in disbelief. Sitting at the library table with Willow and Giles, she was fiddling with her stake and explaining what she saw during lunch. "He sat there sniffing it, burying his face in this one. I swear, half the girls in there were about to need a new change of undies, if you get my meaning."

"Buffy," Giles snapped half scandalized, half intrigued. If this was a twist from halloween night, perhaps it could mean something new for the boy.

Willow could only stare in shock as Buffy picked up an imaginary cinnamon roll.

Holding her hand in front of her face, Buffy closed her eyes and sniffed at it. "Like this! Then he slowly sucked it down, piece by piece, licking his fingers when through. The remaining three he just inhaled. After licking the plate clean, another weirdly thigh clenching moment, he strolled out of the cafeteria without a care to the world. Like he was high on cloud nine. One moment he's bitching at the people in line, the next he was stoned from cinnamon rolls. I tell you, after he left, it was a mad dash for them cinnamon rolls." She made a cutting motion with her hand. "Not a single one survived that rush."

"Yes, well, aside from assaulting pastries, have you noticed anything else untoward happening with Xander?" Giles blanched at the words that had come from his mouth. He could almost feel his IQ drop every time these kids came around. By the time they graduated he felt they would have sucked every last iota of information from him.

Buffy glanced to Willow in confusion, then shrugged. "Not really. I only saw him for a few minutes and then he was gone again. He's avoiding us, but I don't know why. Angel said he was faster than normal last night when he and I talked, do you suppose that is why?"

"It sounds about right. Usually Xander only goes out of his way like this when he is afraid of what I might think. Last time he did this, he had ruined my pink fuzzy sweater. He didn't come back until he had a new one for me." Feeling bad about the past, Willow shrunk down in her seat. "It wasn't even his fault, Jesse was the one who pushed him in to me with the snow cone."

"Yes, well aside from establishing a track record, is there anything else we know?" It was almost a full minute before he gave up. Evidently the only way he would get information out of this bunch was through torture, his. "Fine, I want you to see if you can find Xander tonight before you go out on patrol. Do not harm him, Buffy, just tell him I am concerned for him. Tell him that it is imperative we find out what changes he suffered from Ethan's spell."

Buffy seemed to consider it for a moment before nodding. If there was something seriously hinky with Xander, she would deal with it personally.

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Xander sat mesmerized on the edge of a cliff over looking the ocean below. It was probably the first time he had ever felt like climbing up here to watch the ocean despite living here all his life. He couldn't figure it out, this just seemed like the right place to be. Not that he was paying much attention to his own thoughts. The wide ocean held most of his attention.

There was just something about so much water that it stung his eyes to think about it. He was almost afraid to close his eyes, as if when he opened them again all he would see were dunes. It wasn't anything specific, but he felt like his happiest times had been spent near the ocean.
The lapping sound of the tide going out against the surf lulled him into a daze. So lost in the sounds and experience, he forgot what the sun setting meant for him. It wasn't until he was joined on the rock by a figure in black that Xander even looked away from it all. "The world feels so different now."

"That's no reason to get careless." Angel sat the bone dagger on the rock between them. "I took this before we reached the hospital, I didn't want them asking questions. It looked important."

Xander quickly tucked it down the front of his pants out of sight. "Thank you, I wondered where it had gone." A seagull's cry drew his attention back to the shore. "I never realized how beautiful it was, even after dark."

"The world is still a beautiful place." Watching Xander out of the corner of his eye, Angel scooted closer until they were touching. "You've changed."

"No I haven't, it's the world that's different." He glanced to the vampire, smirking at his put upon sigh. "I know. You're just so cute when you get all huffy. Keep it up, Dead Boy, and someone might mistake you for being alive."

"Xander, they're looking for you. Sooner or later you're going to have to face them." This time he completely faced Xander, making the boy look at him. "Buffy is worried about you."

At the mention of his friend, Xander's face darkened and he looked away. "Yeah, well, she can keep looking. I'm in no hurry to see her again." Self consciously, he rubbed at the bruises on his chest and face. There would be time for dealing with her later. "Right now, I just want to sit and enjoy my ocean. I haven't seen anything this beautiful since my home on Caladan."

"Where was that," Angel asked distractedly. They were going to run him ragged when they found out he saw Xander and didn't force him to come right away.

"Where was what?" He sighed contentedly, taking in the salty air. The fresh breeze had kicked up again. Paradise was no longer just a long ago memory for him.

"You said your home on Caladan. Where is that?" At Xander's shrug, Angel frowned. He was either high, spaced out, or so lost he just didn't give a damn. He was betting a mixture of all three. Out of some self disgusted need to comfort, he slipped an arm around Xander's shoulders. "You'll come to me if you need help?"

"Sure." His voice was barely a whisper having been distracted by the shock of comfort from the broodmiester. Again the waves took him and he felt the need to just be. Ignoring the odd factor of it all, he laid his head on Angel's shoulder.

It was official, Angel was starting to be seriously freaked out. The normally spiteful, foul mouthed hellion was acting like a druggie on the world's greatest stash, seeking him for comfort. There was something seriously wrong with this entire picture. Yet, when Xander's arm slid up under his jacket, all he could do was tighten his hold on him.

After life was funny sometimes.

In the bushes higher up the cliff face, Buffy stood next to Willow, her hand snapping the wooden stake in two at the scene below them.

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Outside of town along a far stretch of road that ended in a scraggle patch, just passed an old
cemetery, the earth tremored.

Spike glanced down at the ground beneath his feet in frustration. Putting out his cigarette with a stomp, he growled. "What the bloody hell is taking them so long?"

"Patience, my sweet Spike." Drusilla slid a gloved hand down the side of Spike's face, cupping his cheek. Leaning in closely, she crooned in his ear. "My prince will get his castle, the peasants didn't build London in a day."

"That's Rome, Pet." At her growl, he smiled and patted her hand. "Right, London it is then. But what is bloody taking so long? This should have been done ages ago."

"They can not inspect so fast as to finish the very last." Singing, she began to giggle again. She wanted to twirl around in the moon light but the strength for it left her body the with such thoughts. Slumping against Spike, Drusilla began to moan. "I don't feel so good, my sweet Spike."

"Okay then, let's go, I'm sick of waiting for those buggers anyways." As he turned for the car, he nodded to the two body guards. "If they return, kill them. Make it painful."

"Away, away, through the woods we go, to grand ma's house. Faster, little red riding hood, faster you go." Pressing a finger to Spike's lips as he helped her in to the car, she tiredly giggled. "Shhh, or the big bad wolf will get us."

"Just let him come, love, I'll save you and have myself a nice meal." With one last fawning glance at her, he closed the door. No sooner than after it shut, the ground beneath him moved. Not just a shake like an earth quake, he noted, but the ripple of something big under his feet actively pushing up. "Bloody hell!"

Jumping across the hood, he slid off the other side and snagged the door handle. Spike jerked it open and flew inside.

The ground shook again as a low groan vibrated the air.

"Hurry, Spike!" All semblance of composure gone, Drusilla clutched at Spike. Her white dress caught up in the gear shift as she slid across the seat to hold on to him. "The big bad wolf is hungry!"

"I'm tryin, the sodding engine won't turn over!" The key turned in the ignition three times before he caught a spark. Not waiting to see if it would hold, he grabbed the gear shift and threw the car in to drive.

The fringe of her dress ripped as the gear shift was pushed forward. Normally she would have complained, but the road beneath their car rocked. Instead, she began to whimper and clutch him harder.

After a quick back fire, the car launched forward and rocketed down the old road towards town. Sighing with relief, Spike caught something in the review mirror. He shuddered as his body guards disappeared in a stream of sand and something unholy.

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Xander was high above the city of Arrakeen staring down upon his enemy's strong hold, doing recon for a strike. They had planned on stealing more thopters and damaging the spice production within the capital city itself. A great blow to the Harkonnen image and it would cost them a pretty sum too.

At his side stood the loyal Fedaykin, their numbers increasing each day as word spread among the
Sietches that the Mahdi had come among them. He would continue to feed their fanaticism in him as their savior until he had achieved his own ends. What was begun by his mother would be finished by him, even if it spread across a thousand worlds.

As things continued to progress, he would soon undertake the final tests to prove himself to be He that can be many places at once, the Kwisatz Haderach. The one who would come from the outer world, he who could see things that no Bene Gesserit could. He would see the past, present, and future. Omniscient, to know it all.

Smiling to himself, Xander lowered the oil lens and glanced behind him to Otheym. The curly haired Fedaykin met Xander's smile with one of his own, puffing up his chest in jest. At times like this he reminded him of his former lover and tutor, Duncan. Perhaps that was why they too were lovers. Then again, Otheym had his own merits that separated him from Duncan Idaho.

A loud explosion of laughter to his right caught their attention and broke in to his thoughts. Smiling at his mentor and protector, Xander slid down the rock into Otheym's arms. "They are ready, Stil. We go in tonight. Leave no Harkonnen alive."

Clasping his friend on the shoulder, Stilgar nodded. "You've planned very wisely, Usul. This attack will be successful."

"Like everyone before it, Usul." Otheym's hands slid down his body, pulling him back against the older man. "Some times I feel you spend more thought on strategy than all the Fremen combined."

Xander gasped as the expert fingers grasped him through his stillsuit. If it weren't for the cloak that covered him, his mentor would have a bird's eye view of what Otheym was doing to him. As it stood, all he could see were Xander's eyes. "I am only doing as I have been taught, Otheym. One can never over think a problem."

"Stop it, the both of you! Usul, keep your passions confined to the bed roll! We are here to kill Harkonnens, not play sex games in the sand." Stilgar growled in anger as Otheym only made his actions more visible and Xander laughed.

Xander awoke with memory of ghost touches across his skin. He could still smell the scent of his lover, the loss of which caused an ache in him.

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"I am going to make it painful. May be a stake through the heart, repeatedly!" Buffy growled as she rescanned the same passage for the tenth time. Unable to focus because of her anger, she sighed and put it down on the table. "No, too quickly. Perhaps drops of acid."

There were fewer things in Giles opinion that scared him more than the possible loss of his precious control. However, listening to Buffy plan the execution of one of her closest friends just for receiving comfort from her vampire significant other was too much to take. Slamming his book down on the table, he removed his glasses and leaned over her. "Listen to yourself, you stupid little girl. Your friend is apparently going through an extremely emotional time at the moment and all you can seem to do is focus on how your boy friend lied to you."

"Giles, he did more than lie! He put his arm around Xander. They weren't comforting, they were snuggling!" Turning to Willow to back her up, Buffy leaned over the table. She stretched her arm out, pushing their research book to Willow. "Tell him, you saw them."

Willow split her attention between the two, shifting from one to the other nervously. It wasn't going
to work, she would have to pick a side. Shifting in her chair, she frowned. "Um, Buffy, uh..."

"Hey all! Is there something big and bad I am missing?" Xander stopped in his tracks at the look Buffy gave him. Starting to back up, he held his bag up in front of him defensively. "Um, hey Buffy. Is there something wrong?"

"Oh nothing, just that I caught you and my boyfriend making out. How is he, by the way, as I haven't spent more than five minutes with him in the last three days. He seems to have only eyes for you even when I'm around." The looks Willow and Giles were giving her didn't phase Buffy one bit. In her opinion, Xander had crossed the line that no real friend should, stealing another's boyfriend. It didn't register on her mind how ridiculous she sounded.

However, where she was blind to her attitude and actions, Xander wasn't. Backing away, he glanced between the three people in the library. "Uh, I can see this was a mistake. I should have known better than to trust him over my own instincts. Giles, Wills," he acknowledged the other two with a nod before fleeing through the doors. Heading down the hall towards the exit, he growled in anger. It shouldn't have been this hard to go to his friends.

So lost in his thoughts, Xander ran in to the back of someone bigger than him. Looking up, he noted the particular shape and cut of the hair. "Sorry, Larry, didn't see you there."

Larry, having recovered his balance, twisted to glare at the other boy. As Xander stepped back away from him, Larry took a menacing step forward. "Fag, what have I told you about getting in my way?"

"I said I was sorry..." Xander was cut off when Jerry, Larry's second grabbed him from behind. "Uh, can you let me go?"

"Hold him! This little bitch apparently needs to relearn his lessons." Handing his bag off to Harmony despite her protest, Larry cracked his knuckles. "This was the third time, Harris, three times I told you, now you gotta pay, man!"

He struggled to get free of Jerry, but the foot baller had an iron grip on his jacket. "Look, you don't want to do this!" His eyes shot wide as Larry grabbed him by the shoulders and rammed his knee up in his crotch.

"Shut the fuck up!" Larry gave Jerry a warning look when he tried to hit Xander himself. "This one's mine, you son of a trawling wench!"

"Bah! You get them all, let us have some fun!" Growling at his Captain, Jerry, bared his teeth in a glare.

While they were distracted, Xander gasped for breath and shook from the pain. After a second, he was able to breath again. Movement above him drew his attention back to Larry. This time he pleaded with the older boy. "Let me go, you don't want me." He would normally be embarrassed by how high his voice was, but there were other more pressing matters.

Like the fact that they did as he asked.

Larry waved a hand in dismissive disgust. "Let him go, Jerry. This weak bitch isn't worth it."

"Larry?" Jerry shook Xander again, but the look his captain gave him made him let go. He wanted to kick some ass, but this time he wasn't going to go against Larry. Yet.

Never one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Xander grabbed his bag and made a run for it. He kept
going until he was out of the school and down the block away from it. By the time he reached the bus depot, he was coughing horsecly, gasping for air. Xander leaned against the outer wall of the building and continued to hack up a lung.

After his racing pulse had slowed and the spots in his eyes faded, he turned around and fell against the wall and sank down. He clutched himself through the front of his pants, holding on the throbbing balls. Tears started on the edge of his vision. It just wasn't fucking right.

He sat there for an unknown amount of time. When he finally felt ready to get up, the sun was close to setting. It didn't bother him to watch the sun go down out over the edge of the city. Standing, he used the wall for support, it felt strange being here after so late an hour. They usually patrolled the cemeteries and the back allies, this far out on the edge of town was a new experience.

Something drew his attention to the desert. He took a step towards it, a strange longing filling him. The beauty of it, away from the ocean, away from the city, the peace to be found among the dry hills. He could hear the laughing of children, their voices calling him back to the dunes. His people, his family, his home.

"You can sense it, can't ya kid?" Coming up to stand beside Xander, he anticipated the blade that was suddenly at his throat being held by Xander's extended arm. "I gotta tell ya, even without that weird guy in control, you still scare the shit outta me."

"What are you talking about?" Surprised by his own actions, Xander glanced down at his arm and the blade held in his hand. It had been pure instinct, the action was beyond his understanding how it happened. "Best make it quick, I'm not sure how long I can last without twitching."

"Right." Taking a deep breath, he caught his adam's apple on the edge of the blade and swallowed. "Well. Um. I'm sorta here as a representative of some people in charge of all this mess. They sent me with a message."

"Is that right?" Smirking, Xander flexed his hand and the blade slid up the man's neck. He slowly traced the hairline, removing stubble from his neck. "Tell me, what is it they want from me?"

"You know about the powers?" This time he was surprised for an entirely different reason.

"Sure, there has to be someone out there reffing this. Not like there are many rules, but there are a few, and someone had to make them." As he said it, Xander realized it was true. Not that he ever paid attention to anything, it just came to him as he thought it. Like there was something inside him that was normally dormant taking control, flexing a muscle that was rarely used.

"Okay then." Eyeing the young man with something akin to fear, he slowly thought about how to word the message, to articulate how exactly they wanted him to act. After a moment, he nodded and frowned. "They want me to tell you 'you're on your own on this one', kid. The others can't help you and if you can't remember what is necessary, more people are gonna die."

"What kinda message is that?" As he turned to give the man a thorough interrogation, he noticed the man was gone. "That was really annoying. And what the hell am I supposed to remember?" His questions fell on empty night as the sun disappeared over the horizon.

Despite the intense heat of the evening, Xander drew his jacket up over his shoulders. For the past two days he had felt exposed, almost naked in his normal clothes. Anything that left his body bare to the elements was completely out. Tossing up his collar in a way he knew would earn him ridicule from Buffy, he headed back for the side walk and toward home.
There are times when Buffy was certain that someone is out to get her. Well aside from the whole forces of darkness thing. And a few rogue humans. The bad guys. Principal Snyder. The cheerleading squad. That weird statue in the trophy case. And the strange Cordette pod people.

It would be in all their best interests to just avoid her at times like this because she felt like she could take on an apocalypse or three and still have time to bake up a storm. Well she was doing the baking thing. Not that they were turning out better than the last twelve batches of door stop cookies she had made.

Perhaps there was still an apocalypse in the offing?

Sighing, she dropped the pan of cookies in the trash and put the pan in the sink. Enough of the burning things for one night. After the battle of wills and Wills in the library earlier, she had finally taken a listen to herself and blanched. The whole idea she was jealous of her best guy friend and her boyfriend was ridiculous.

Xander was straight. Umpata had proven that. So had the substitute teacher last year. And the countless times he had tried hitting on her. Not once had he gotten lucky, but she could always count on him to brighten her day with his flattery. And that was what was really important, that he cared for her in that special way, a way he didn't feel for Angel.

Feeling like a complete moron, she had decided to try her hand at baking. Frowning at the mound of burnt hockey pucks in the trash, it appeared her slaying skills were the extent of her skills, and that it extended to all aspects of her life. She was glad she didn't have a pet or even a house plant, who needed a zombie cat.... again?

Deciding she was weirding herself out with all the brooding, she groaned and removed the apron. "That's it, I am officially throwing in the proverbial towel, I can not cook."

"Take a number, dear, at your age I could burn water. It just takes lots of practice and infinite patience." Joyce came up beside her daughter and kissed her on the forehead. "I know you wanted to make him those cookies, but perhaps you should just do like I suggested and buy them from the bakery down town."

Sighing, Buffy nodded. "All right, have it your way. Just tell it to my future husband when he complains that I can't cook."

"Trust me, dear, he'll thank me for stopping you." Passing by Buffy on her way out of the kitchen with a glass of orange juice, she smiled.

Buffy watched her mother go with something akin to suspicion. "What can I say, I lied." Winking, she moved around the corner and in to the dining room.

She continued to stand there staring where her mother had disappeared. After a few moments, she blinked and frowned. "My mother the liar. And she wonders why I am the way I am."

Sitting in the kitchen at the table doing his homework, Xander growled in anger. The TV was distracting him. He knew complaining would do no good, so he just bit down on the edge of his pencil and focused on the work. It was a simple enough assignment, figuring out the basics of
geometry.

The hard part was seeing it on the paper.

Two dimensional physics were always hard. He had to see it in action to understand the dynamics. About the time he started to figure out what exactly was going on in the diagram, the TV started blaring a cheerful jingle for ice cream. Figuring it a lost cause, he slammed the pencil down, got up and walked over to the counter top.

He needed something to eat to help him get his mind on the work. In the dim light from the overhead, he could see that the ramen soup was all his mother had left out again. In the fridge he could probably scrounge up something for a sandwich, if she hadn't forgot to get bread that is. Sighing, he grabbed a pot out of the cabinet and filled it with water.

After setting it on the stove and turning it on, he went back to his homework. The visuals of the problem came back to his mind like he hadn't just spent the last five minutes not thinking about it. It didn't occur to him that he could recall every detail of it, just that it was still a bitch to solve.

When it still refused to right itself in his mind, he sat down. Closing his eyes, he took a steadying breath. He pushed all other things from his mind and focused on the aspects of the problem. With a firm hold on them, he opened his eyes. The variables played out in his mind as he calculated the degrees.

Slowly, the figures started to make sense to him. The degree of the incline would alter the placement of the stone. It came to him in a snap. The reason it hadn't been making sense was because the problem was configured using wrong variables. His teacher had made a mistake in calculating the trajectory. If the rock hit the window, it would be because of outside factors, not the force given by the thrower.

By the time he recalculated the numbers and fixed the mistake, the water on his stove was boiling. With a satisfied moan, he set the pencil down again and stood up. He quickly put the noodles in the water. Munching on the broken tips from the bag, he waited for the noodles to finish boiling.

He was in such a good mood he sang along with an annoying jingle. It didn't matter if anyone heard him, he was in too good a mood. For once he had out smarted the math teacher. Life was definitely good.

Soon enough the noodles were done and he drained off some of the water before adding the spice mix. Smelling it, he felt a little disgusted by the scent, it needed something. He began rummaging through the spice cabinet until he found something to add. Grabbing the red container he assumed was cayenne, he shook some in the soup and mixed it together. The smell of it wafting up hit his nostrils and he was ready to die for it if necessary. There were never a food that tasted so good to him. Not since the cinnamon rolls the day before had he been so nuts about the flavor of something. Before he knew it, the entire bowl was empty, licked clean.

His irritation at the math alleviated with the completion of the single most annoying problem, he smiled contentedly at the rest. After the one he had finished, the others were relatively simple. A quick turn here, an estimate there and he was through. With a final look over, he smiled and put the finished homework in the folder. The folder went in his backpack before being hung off the back of the chair.

Yawning, he stood up and headed for bed, turning off the kitchen light along the way. He stopped in the living room. Glancing about the empty room, he sighed, good mood suddenly evaporating.
Reaching in his pocket, he pulled out the remote and turned off the television. Another glance about the completely empty house, then he went up to bed.

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The setting that greeted him the following morning in the library after being ambushed by Willow outside the school and dragged in was not what he had expected. Buffy was dressed like Susie Homemaker, serving soda and donuts, tea to Giles and a diet soda to Ms. Calendar. What made him think something evil and hideous had taken over his slayer friend was the fact she smiled at him warmly and offered him a cookie.

Accepting it slowly, he stared wide eyed at her, subtly sniffing for booze. "Thank you, Pod Buffy. Are you feeling well this morning?" At her slight frown, he flinched and drew back.

"Sorry, Xander, yeah." Reaching up, she rubbed at the fading bruises under his hair line. Her fingers gently rubbed a soothing circle on Xander's temple. "I am really so sorry, Xander. I've been kinda slayer rage bitch this past week. There is no excuse for it except, um, there is no excuse."

Still feeling majorly weirded out, he allowed himself to be drawn in to the room. Eyeing her carefully, he let her push him down in a chair. It was still in the yellow, but if she talked about converting him or him sleeping, he was going to scream like a little girl, pride be damned. "I understand that, but what about the outfit?"

Glancing down at the pink uniform, she sighed. "Um, I got some bad news. Snyder caught me coming in early with the donuts."

"Let me guess, he took all the jelly filled and stuck his finger in the center of the cream donut?" Xander really prayed he was right.

"Close. He took the jelly, but left the cream one unmolested only after I threatened to remove his little troll doll balls. Which was a moment of major Ew!" She shuddered for dramatic effect much to the amusement of all involved. Getting out the untouched cream donut, she set it in front of Xander along with another cookie. "Anyways, he wouldn't believe I was just running an errand of good will, which I totally was. Xander, this is an apology breakfast. I tried making the cookies last night, let's just say I have a whole new appreciation for mom's snicker doodle recipe.

"Giles, you will be happy to note I slayed all eleven or so dozen with deadly precision," she said with a smile to her Watcher. "Back to the weasel. He told me that since I had so much free time on my hands, I wouldn't mind volunteering to cater the school talent show this year. So not only do we have to come up with a skit, I have to serve the milk and cookies to those suck ups who actually volunteered." At the glance shared between Xander and Willow, she sighed. "Right, no one volunteers if they can help it. Damn you, Snyder!"

"Yes, well, as amusing as we all find this, I am afraid I have some rather bad news." Adjusting his glasses and setting down his tea cup, Giles stood up from the table. Moving to stand at the head so that he could grab things when necessary, he turned to Xander. "Welcome back, Xander, I am glad you felt comfortable enough around us once more. I am sure it was trying for you, having the memories of your recent possession and all."

"What memories?" This earned him four very concerned looks. Feeling like odd man out again, he groaned. "Okay, I am going to sound like a complete head case, but what was I possessed by this time? Last time I didn't remember, so why would now be any different?"

"You really can't recall?"
"Uh, no." Now he was certain this was an episode of the twilight zone.

"Oh dear." Adjusting his glasses, Giles frowned. This was not at all what he had been expecting and that did not bode well. Perhaps his books had a better explanation. "Well, from what I have learned, everyone who bought a costume at Ethan's shop was possessed by whatever their costume was. Buffy became a noble woman, Willow became a ghost..."

"Cordelia became a bitch. Ooops, my mistake, that wasn't the costume." Buffy grumbled, her anger from the past couple days returning. When no one spoke, she looked up at Giles. "What?"

"As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, those who purchased and wore their costumes, were taken over by the personalities engendered within them. Whoever, or should I say, whatever you were should have left some form of memory mark on your psyche." When he finished, he expected to see a reaction on Xander's face. Blank disbelief was not that reaction. "I can't understand why this hasn't happened with you. Perhaps you are repressing them."

"Nope, I'd know if I was repressing anything." Well he would, repressing was something he was good at. Like the feeling to get the hell out of there, he was repressing that one beautifully. He didn't feel comfortable around these people, not anymore. As a matter of fact, that repression just got repealed.

"There has to be some form of explanation for this, Xander. You can't just have forgotten whatever had taken control. Those memories are now a part of... Where are you going?" Giles was confounded. The boy had gone from calm to pale and panicky in a heart beat. Now he was following him towards the door. "Xander?"

He didn't respond, just drew his back pack tighter. Xander hit the doors so hard they swung back and hit is bag. He heard something fall from it but couldn't be bothered to care what. It wasn't important, he could replace it later.

Giles stood transfixed, staring where Xander had left. After a moment, his thoughts cleared enough to allow him reasoning again. He stared down where he saw something fall from the boy's backpack. Frowning, he bent over and picked it up.

"What is it, Giles? Did we do something wrong?" Coming up to stand beside her Watcher, Buffy undid the apron strings on her hostess uniform.

"No, we did nothing wrong at all." Studying the container, he held it up for everyone to see. "As for what it is, it's a spice bottle, Cinnamon to be precise."

"Geeze, I heard of addictions, but Cinnamon is strange even for the hellmouth." Snorting, Buffy took the spice from Giles. She walked back to the table and set it in the center of the donuts and cookies. "Why would he be carrying this around with him?" On a hunch, she picked it up, uncapped it and tasted the spice. "Whoa! That's pretty strong!" She coughed a little and put the lid back on. "Mom has some of that in the cabinet at home, it's pure cinnamon sticks, uncut. High grade addiction."

"Well now we know what it is, only question is why." Jenny, who had been silent until now thought on what they had told her. "Buffy, what did you mean he was addicted to Cinnamon?"

"Just exactly as I said. Take for instance day before yesterday. During lunch, he scarffed down five, may be six Cinnamon rolls. He acted like they were the greatest thing in the world, even cut in line to get at them." Still looking at the bottle, she shook her head. "That isn't the Xander I know. He isn't a spice freak, there's seriously something wrong with him."
"Spice? Cinnamon. This sounds familiar." Frowning in concentration, she tried to recall what exactly about it triggered her memory. When nothing came, she looked up at Giles and shook her head. "I'm drawing a blank. Can't remember what, but I know I know this."

Willow watched all of this with growing horror. Something was wrong with Xander, her Xander.

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By the time he realized what it was he had lost, Xander was ready to kill something. The craving for the spice was already making his hands shake. He was in the middle of third period and wasn't sure he would make it through another. His body began to twinge inside, causing him to wince.

Glancing up at the clock, he groaned in disappointment, it hadn't even been a minute since he last looked. Thinking desperately, he realized there might be something with cinnamon in his bag. He couldn't have been stupid enough only to grab the spice jar this morning. There had to have been more in there.

Xander grabbed his bag from the floor beside his chair and began to riffle through it. He was in study hall so there was no one beside himself to worry about with all the noise. When he couldn't find anything, he stuck his nose in the bag to search. The bag smelled of cinnamon, but only so much as the trace left from harboring the bottle inside.

Letting the bag drop to the floor beside his chair, he took a deep breath. The smell of cinnamon seductively filled his nostrils. Immediately, he zeroed in on the source. Three seats down, two rows back, chewing gum. It took him a moment to realize he was staring, another moment to realize who he was staring at.

Larry was glaring at him in return.

Facing front again, Xander nervously tapped his hands on the arm rests. When he felt safe again, he glanced over his shoulder. Larry had given up glaring at him and was back to chewing his gum, Xander noted. Feeling a bold streak coming on, he knew what he had to do. He got up from his chair slowly as not to arouse the suspicions of others.

Sliding out of the row, he made his way to the row behind Larry. He slid in the chair behind Larry and put his bag down. Xander smiled when Larry glared at him again. Leaning forward, he cleared his throat and asked softly, "do you have another piece of gum I can have?"

"No, now fuck off." Larry nearly growled over his shoulder.

It was the wrong thing to say. Xander, in a moment of crazed need for something so close, grabbed the other boy by the shoulders and hauled him back. His hands given the strength of desperate madness easily deflected Larry's shocked blocking.

Larry opened his mouth to ask Xander what the fuck he thought he was doing only to find Xander's mouth on his own, tongue shoved down his throat.

Xander sucked on the jock's mouth, trying to fight his tongue to get at the piece of gum. He rolled his head in slow circles to allow his tongue more room to maneuver, going over every surface of Larry's mouth. Subconsciously he cataloged the different tastes, but his goal was the cinnamon flavored gum. It was growing time to breathe, but his need for the spice was more urgent. Finally, at the back of Larry's mouth, on the edge of his throat, Xander struck pay dirt. Sucking his prize in, he let go of Larry and sucked on the gum with a sound of appreciation.

Laying there with his upper body hanging over the edge of the chair, Larry blinked, stunned. His
mouth hung open, gasping for breath. He was also harder than he had ever been in his life. By the
time he came around to notice they were the center of attention, the bell rang.

Not wanting to get caught up in a hail of questions, Xander grabbed his bag and rushed from the
room, shoving Jonathan in to a gaggle of air heads. The little man would forgive him, he just gave
him an excuse to cop a feel. The hall wasn't much better, people were packed in there like a log jam.

He pushed his way through the students and headed for the library. Fourth period would have to wait
until he got his cinnamon back. Moving quickly towards his goal, Xander began to plan his attack.
There was a good chance that Giles would be on the alert, so he would have to create a distraction.

Snatching the rubber ball from a random kid's hand, he stalked for the library ignoring the kid's cry.
Outside the door, he surveyed the scene through the glass window. Giles was at the book return
desk, a large stack of books beside him, his spice jar was on the table in plain view. Smiling, Xander
pushed open the door and tossed the ball with deadly accuracy at the books.

The books went flying off the desk and Giles bent over to grab them as they fell. Unfortunately for
him they were too many and he was only one and they took him down with him. When he climbed
to his feet, the door the library doors were already swinging shut. Whoever it had been was already
gone.

Glancing down at his books, he glowered. If he got his hands on whoever owned the ball that was
just now coming to a rest at his feet, he would kill them. The doors flew open again as he bent down
to pick it and the books up. Standing quickly to catch who this was, he slapped his hands on the
book return with an "Ah Ha!"

Unfortunately, this sent his books falling back down and the ball shooting off in to his library.

Mark caught his ball as it shot at his head. Smiling, he waved at Giles. "Thanks, I thought he lost it!"
"Who's he?"

"Xander Harris. Freak came by and snatched my ball." Walking out with a snort, Mark rolled his
eyes.

"Xander?" Giles glanced to the table still partially covered in bakery boxes and frowned. It was still
untouched, except for the Cinnamon. The spice was gone.
Sand In Your Eyes

"...Blessed, Mingle the waters,
let the change come to all,
that the people may partake,
and share in the blessing."
- Lady Jessica, Reverend Mother of the Fremen.

He was running for his life, dragging his mother behind him. The Sand Worm was on their tail and it was closing fast. After what felt like an eternity they reached the edge of the rock face and started to climbed. He pushed her in front of him and used his strength to lift her higher up the rocks. "Move, mother! The worm!"

"I hear it, Paul!" Rushing up the face of the cliff, Jessica grabbed anything she could to assist her further. They were only climbing vertically, not away from the monster worm. Too soon, she ran out of rock face to climb and all that was left was a small catch in the rock. Cold panic gripped her and she held tight to her son.

Xander slipped his mother's body behind him as the Sand Worm rose up from the dune. All fear left him as he watched the great beast's maw come straight for them. It's cry echoed deeply through him to the core, shaking even the great rock. Clutching the rock face as the worm drew closer, he began to chant the Litany Against Fear. "I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain."

As he finished the last line, a vibration could be felt through the rock, a regular thumping in counter tune to the scream of the worm. He registered that on some level someone must have planted it, but he was lost in trance. The worm had breathed on them, that breath smelled of spice. The worms were the source!

As he thought on this, the thumps increased until he could swear they were right next to his head. A loud crash next to his head had him reacting without thought. He grabbed the wrist of the person holding the book and jerked him forwards off his feet. Rising from his desk, Xander twisted the arm around behind the person's back and planted his foot on their spine.

It took him a moment to realize it was the teacher he had stretched out like a goat skin and not an attacker. Releasing the man to fall face first on the floor, he held up his hands. "Sorry."

Mr. Felance wheezed painfully from his place on the floor. Arm stretched out behind him at an odd angle, he started to whimper and tear up.

Suddenly feeling bad, Xander knelt down to help the man only to have his teacher scream bloody murder and scrabble to get away. This was not a good thing. Backing away, Xander grabbed his bag. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..." Avoiding the looks of the other students, Xander ran to door, threw it open and took off down the hall.

As he rounded the corner for the exit, he saw Snyder blocking the way, talking to one of the ass kissing students. He suddenly felt the need to run faster than before. Desperation driving him, he
focused his entire body on running. Before he knew it, the doors were in front of him and he was by passing them.

In the hall way behind him, Snyder's papers blew from his hands. "What the hell?" Glancing up from Tonya Radcliff's snug blouse, Snyder glanced about the hall for any sign of the wind. The sun reflecting off the door drew his attention down the hall. It was swinging closed and he just knew 'The Summers' had something to do with this.

Xander didn't stop until he reached the desert lots just passed the old town Cemetery. Falling to his knees, he gasped for breath and shook from high emotions. He honestly didn't mean the teacher harm, he just acted on instincts, he knew that. It just was wrong, he wasn't normally that kind of person, that was Buffy's thing.

Wiping his nose, he frowned. "What the hell is wrong with me?" It didn't make sense, he shouldn't be this fast. There was supposed to be a limit to his speed, he was a normal human, wasn't he? Terrible realization hit him. "Oh god, I'm not human. Don't panic, Xan-man, it'll be fine. You just got to get back to the G-man and he'll help out. That's right, they'll help you.... in to an early grave." If they knew he wasn't human, Buffy's fists of death would be the last thing he ever saw.

"No, can't go to the G-man. This must be something to do with the Halloween possession thing. Think, Xander, think." Tapping his forehead, he frowned. "Think, think, think!" Nothing came to mind on how to deal with this. He wasn't the plan guy, that was Giles, he was the 'Hulk Smash' guy. He could do the grunt work, he was good at the grunt work.

Panicking, he climbed to his feet, then swayed from the sudden action. His body clenched from the need. Hands shaking, he grabbed his bag off his shoulder. His fingers took three tries to undo the buckles on his sack before they opened. Finally getting it, he jerked it open and reached inside the bag.

He pulled out the bottle of Cinnamon with a cry of relief. Much to his disappointment, the bottle was almost empty. Glancing down at his supply, he gaged that perhaps another two doses were left before he needed another supply. Shaking his head, he grabbed the cap and began to twist it.

A sudden tremor in his hands forced him drop the bottle. "Shit! No!" Xander tried to catch it, but his actions caused the bottle to spin mid fall. The contents emptied across the ground as it hit and the Cinnamon sticks shattered. "No!" Bending down, he scooped up hand fulls of the dirt and tried to separate the spice from it by lettuce it blow in the wind. Unfortunately, it had the opposite effect and the spice dissipated.

Crying out in frustration, he slammed his fists on the sand repeatedly. Was nothing ever going to go right? After his temper tantrum, he sank in defeat back on his heels. It was no use, his symptoms would only get worse until his body consumed itself in the need for the spice and ultimately death. A sickly feeling of dread filled him with the thought of may be that was the solution.

Why not let the addiction kill him?

It would no doubt be extremely painful, but it would be his death, something he decided for himself. There would be no blood on his friend's hands and the best part, he could finally get over this damned addiction that made him a freak of nature. Mind made up, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. It felt easier to breathe than it had in a long time, however, the breath was both bitter and sweet at the same time.

Upon the winds he could taste something extremely familiar. Almost instinctively, he started to crawl towards it. The very presence of it overrode all sense of self, taking control of his entire faculty with
the drive to obtain it. Moving on all fours, he quickly came upon the source of the smell and inhaled deeply.

All across the ground spread for hundreds of feet was something darker brown than the sand, almost green in color. Feeling the urge to taste it, Xander grabbed a handful of the sand.

He knew exactly how to separate it from the sand. He put down his bag across from him to play catcher. Dropping the sand slowly from his hand, he blew through the stream, causing the lighter material to separate and collect on the bag. When the entire hand full was gone, he pulled the bag to him and slowly swept the material in a pile.

Staring at it reverently, he picked up a pinch and tasted it. Eyes closed in bliss, he laid back and enjoyed the sudden relief from his cravings.

Huskily, he whispered, "spice."

It was midnight by the time he had finished gathering the last of the spice. It helped that it was only spread across the ground and not mixed with the dirt. Despite how large a patch it had been, the finished amount was just enough to fill his back pack. That little amount would keep him alive for probably thirty years. And on top of that, he noted with a grimace, it weighed enough to almost break his back.

There was little chance of it getting any lighter, so he decided it was now or never. Putting his removed shirt over the spice to prevent it from falling out, he tightened the draw strings as far as they would go, then locked them in place. With a mighty heave, he lifted the bag, first on to one shoulder, then the other.

When the bag settled down, he had to stagger his steps to prevent himself from falling over. After fifteen steps, he felt comfortable enough with the location of the bag to walk straight. He headed back to the place he left his books tied in his jacket.

Quick finagling with his foot lifted the jacket by the knotted arms in to the air so he could catch it. Hunched over from the weight on his back, he barely caught the flying coat. When he did, he had to stagger a little to keep from falling over. Soon again he had his footing. The Crysknife stuffed down the front of his pants started to chafe against his inner thigh from the strain.

Reaching down the front of his pants, he adjusted the knife then himself for good measure. Grinning, he turned back towards town. It would be a long walk, but he felt stronger than he had ever in his life. It was good to have spice once again.

As a matter of fact, he could feel the spice working its way through his body. Slowly, he was becoming himself once more. Hell, when he blinked, the world slowly changed from dark to light. His everything was improving.

By the time he reached town, the bag was still the same weight, but it felt easier to handle. It was the spice, he knew. It gave healing and rejuvenate abilities. Surprisingly enough, there were several people still out this late despite the town's history. It had been five days since Halloween, yet the damage done that night had disappeared.

Coming up main street, he smiled at the people who stopped to check him out. He had a body, he was young, he was not above showing off, even if he wasn't the best specimen. It didn't bother him one bit that he was drawing more male looks than female. In fact, he encouraged it. If his past was
any thing to go by, he'd much rather try his chances with a guy this time.

There was one problem, however, not one single guy held his attention long enough to qualify. They all were copies of the same guy model, like they were just cookie cuttered from the same material, only colored different. It wasn't that bad, just not what he wanted. Sighing with disappointment, he rounded the corner to head for home.

He kept to the main streets and side walks to avoid possible waiting vampires or demons. Despite the fact he felt like a million bucks, it wouldn't do to get cocky against someone not even the buffster could handle alone. It wasn't until he reached his block that he realized he was being followed.

Hand quickly fishing in his pants, he pulled out the dagger. "Come out or I will come in and get you."

Stepping out of the shadows, Angel held up his hands. He tilted his head, raising an eyebrow at the strange smell coming from the boy. "Why do you smell different?"

"Why are you following me?" Not giving an inch, Xander gripped the blade in one hand. He wasn't afraid of the vampire, not anymore. He knew he was more than a match for Dead Boy now. The spice had seen to that. Part and parcel, that which would kill him from the cravings also redeemed itself with the added bonuses from constant use.

"I asked you first. It's only fair that you answer first." Angel thought he was being smart, that ended when Xander just walked away instead of rising to the bait. With a groan, he rushed to catch up. "Hey, wait up!"

"Drop deader, Dead Boy!" Shouldering the pack higher, Xander picked up speed. He was determined to out run the older being. When it seemed Angel would catch him, he put on the extra speed and reached his house a moment later.

Angel stopped mid step and blinked. 'Did I just see him...' "Not possible." Before he could make any more inquires, Xander was closing the door. He sighed with frustration, despite it not being necessary. "What is going on with you?"

"That's what I'd like to know?" Buffy came out from behind a tree off to Angel's right. Twirling her stake between her hands, she cocked her head at her boyfriend. She smiled bitchily while stepping towards him. "Here I'm thinking that I am just imagining things, that my boyfriend and my best guy friend aren't up to something and low and behold, I'm not so paranoid after all."

"Buffy, it's not what you think." Frowning, he shrugged. "What do you think is going on?"

"I think you're stalking Xander." Crossing her arms, she let the stake stick out in plain sight. "Stalking in the same fashion I just up til five minutes ago, found an endearing trait. Now I'm wondering if you are stalking all my friends or just Xander? What is it with you, the moment someone starts to give in to your advances you move on? And what the hell am I saying? This entire conversation has taken a major turn for the weird."

Half smiling at her, Angel stepped towards her. Meeting her a few feet off the side walk, he grinned down at her. "You jealous that I'm no longer hanging around in the shadows for you?"

"It appears that way." Her nose scrunched. This was quickly turning in to one of those jealous, psycho girlfriend moments for her. Remembering just what exactly her point was, she tightened the fold of her arms. "What is going on with you stalking Xander? Is he all right or do I need to get my Slayer cap on?"
"I'm not sure." At her grumpy look, Angel sighed. "Which means I'm not sure. There is nothing certain enough for me to even hazard a guess. He just smells funny tonight, kinda sweet."

"Must be the Cinnamon." This time it was her chance to sigh. "Haven't you been paying attention? Xander's been hooked on the stuff for the past several days. Every time I see him or get near enough to smell, he wreaks of it. I tell you, the strong smell of potpourri is now a major turn off."

"That might be it," he mentioned distractedly. Glancing over his shoulder at the house, Angel shrugged. "I'm not sure."

Groaning, Buffy slapped his arm. "Enough with the sure, you're killing me! Let's go slay something before I go stir crazy."

"You go on ahead, I need to check something out." Not waiting for her response, Angel walked off in to the shadows and disappeared.

Watching the spot he disappeared at, Buffy shook her head. It just wasn't fair. When Xander was smelling bad, her love life suffered.

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Xander wiped a floury hand across his forehead and sighed in exhaustion. Despite the energy provided by the Spice, he could barely keep his eyes open any longer. The moment he had come home, he had made sure no one was awake and started to bake. Now it was three hours later. Half his supply of spice had been turned in to chewable candy. This made it easier to carry and ingest. Had this been Arrakis, the candy would have only been one of many things made with the spice. However, since it was so precious, the spice could only be used for food.

His lips longed to taste the spice beer. It's heady drink overrode the senses of even the most experienced drinker. The first time he had tasted it was on Duncan's lips the night they brought him in, drunk and raving about a traitor. It had taken all his cunning not to let his tutor go after his mother and any other who might pose a threat. That and his body.

Shaking himself from his thoughts, Xander took a heavy breath to dissipate the suppressed grief. Duncan had been dead for four years. It wasn't his fault, it was the Harkonnen, his grand father. Xander's hand clenched in anger from the knowledge that he was related to that bastard.

The light flicked on in the kitchen surprising him from his hatred. Coming in to stand beside Xander in her fuzzy blue robe, his mother smiled at him. Her carefully manicured hand came up to scratch at the back of her neck in thought. "Honey, what are you doing up so late?"

"Nothing, mom, just making some candy. And you know you shouldn't do that, it causes the paint to flake and your boss will get pissed." Grabbing her hand from the back of her neck, he gently smoothed his fingers over the nails. "No damage this time, be careful or you might snag one."

"I'm wearing the plastic ones. All that paint is too much a pain to deal with." At his expression, she patted him on the shoulder. "Sorry, I know how much you liked doing them, but I don't have that kinda energy anymore."

"I didn't like doing it. You just needed someone to help you get ready and I being the only one who was here, helped. I'm good at helping, I'm the Helper." Striking a super man pose, hands on hips, he smiled. "I help!"
"Nice try. I know you liked playing with my nails. Sometimes I wondered if you were more interested in girly things than boy things. Then you hit puberty and that went out the window." Yawning, she walked over to the fridge and got a glass of milk. "Sometimes I think it might have been better if you turned out gay, then may be you might clean up your room."

"Mom!" He turned slightly red at her words and how close they came to the truth. If only she knew the thoughts he had been thinking before she came in. "Sides, even if I was gay, that wouldn't change the fact I don't care to clean up my room. It's my room, and I like it just the way it is."

"Fine. Fine. Just, if I smell something dead coming from it, you're not getting any allowance for a month." Walking over to stand beside him at the counter, she leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. Rubbing off the lipstick with a frown at having forgotten to take it off, she shook her head. "Don't stay up too late, Alexander, tomorrow is a school day or at least it should be. Night shift tends to make the days run together. Either way, bed."

"I will, just as soon as I am done here." On a whim, he picked up a small piece of the candy and handed it to her. "Sweets for the sweet?"

"Don't push your luck, Mister." Accepting it, she ate it with little fuss. "Good. Is that Cinnamon?"

"Yep, its the secret ingredient. Night, mom." Watching her head back to bed with her milk, he felt a twinge in his chest for her. She wasn't a bad mother, she wasn't abusive, wasn't neglectful, but there was always something missing from their relationship. Something that defined who was the child and who was the parent at times.

Feeling down, he went back to work wrapping the candy in wax paper.

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Jack Dawlton hated gophers. He hated them with a passion. There was nothing worse in his opinion than a fucking gopher. The fact that the radiation from them bombs the government had dropped in the desert had mutated them in to monsters made it even worse.

Sitting on the rocks in his garden, he watched the gopher mound circle his house. The damned thing had shown up after he blasted the other gopher hole to dust. It was the biggest god damned gopher mound he had ever seen, but not the strangest thing he had ever seen.

After circling his house three times, it had eaten his dog, Zeke. Old Zeke had come running off the porch barking at it and suddenly the ground beneath him had disappeared and Zeke along with it.

That was when Jack had decided to stop playing fair.

He'd first tried to lead it through his traps, but the damned thing was so big it busted every one of them. He then noticed how it followed his every movement and had tried to run it through a retaining wall on the far side of his yard. That too had failed because the gopher wasn't a damned graboid and was far smarter than that stupid movie monster anyways.

Next, he had tried a shot gun, that only seemed to make it angry and the it growled at him. It had gone off for a few minutes towards the chicken coup and that had been the last time he heard them chickens ever screech. After that it came back from the yard and started to circle again.

Well, he had grabbed his last two sticks of dynamite from his pocket and now he sat upon a rock. If it was big enough to dig this rock up, well he reconed it was more than welcome to eat him. But he was going to give it one hell of a case of indigestion.

Lighting the fuse of one of the sticks, he tossed it in the path of the gopher. Suddenly the ground
beneath it twirled as if in a cyclone and sank down two feet. When the ground had stopped moving
the dynamite was gone. A moment later, so was the gopher.

A loud explosion rocked the ground as the Earth was launched high in the air.

Waving at the dust and guts that now pelted him, Jack chuckled breathly. There wasn't no damned
gopher, no size, that could out do him! Coughing from the unexpected smoke cloud, he gasped at the
strong stench of Cinnamon coming from the crater.

Coming to stand beside the hole, he waved once more to dispell the clouds and glanced inside.
Whatever the gopher had looked like before, it was now just so much orange guts now. Getting a
better look of the hole, he growled. "Son of a bitch!" The destruction from the blast had left a thirty
foot long trench in his yard.

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Sitting outside on a bench across from the school, Xander chewed absently on a piece of Spice
Candy. After not having gotten to bed until four that morning, he woke up five hours too late for
school. Now it was just a little after noon and he was waiting for the others to come out to their usual
lunch place out front. Well he was hoping they would come, it was a sunny day after all.

His only problem was what he would say to them. He hadn't been feeling comfortable enough
around them to open up. It just didn't make any sense. There should have been nothing wrong with
him. Not that there was, he just didn't like being exposed to them.

Shifting uncomfortably, Xander pulled his back pack closer. He had stuffed the bag full of supplies
just in case he needed them. It was an old habit that he didn't intend to break. Inside were two sets of
clothes, a secondary dagger, two liters of water, a pair of wide sole soft-boots, some food, and three
bricks of spice candy. He would have to improvise the paracompass and few other necessities that
were missing from his standard pack.

One never knew when one might need emergency supplies.

Sitting out in the open, he felt vulnerable for a number of reasons, one of which was the lack of
concealing clothing. No matter what he tried on, nothing felt right to him. To Xander, none of his
clothes felt right, like they were a part of some costume. The only thing he even felt remotely
comfortable in was a full body suit and a blanket held in place with a safety pin.

That had been an embarrassing moment from his childhood he had never wanted to relive. Yet now,
he wasn't so sure. The blanket, though it made him look like a demented superman, felt comfortable
in how much it concealed. Exposure to the elements for any great period of time meant death on
Arrakis.

But this wasn't Arrakis.

Xander sighed. He forced himself from running all the way back home and getting the cloak that
went along with his costume. No matter how much he wanted it, the clothing was not functional.

The out pouring of students from the building distracted him from thoughts of clothes. He watched
them congregate and meet up with their friends. The seniors were already heading for the parking lot,
being able to go off campus and eat. He didn't need to stay on campus to eat, hell, he had spent more
time off campus during the school day the past week than on. Six days since halloween and suddenly
he was a delinquent.

Snickering, Xander almost missed Willow slip through the crowd searching for something. A twinge
inside made him realize she was probably looking for him. Instead of going to her or signaling he was here, he held back and waited. If she was vigilant, she would notice him across the campus.

Willow didn't see him and headed back inside.

He felt a little sad that she had missed him, but mostly relieved. It was a big relief not to have to deal with the whole group today. Willow was his best friend, but her heavy emotions were not a good idea. He could barely handle himself as it was.

Despite needing to feel a part of the group again, Xander shook it off. Perhaps another time. Grabbing his bag, he started to stand up.

"What's the big rush?" Walking up under the tree to stand beside Xander, Buffy clutched a twig in her hands. The feeling deep inside her was one of apprehension despite him being her friend.

"Something going on you wanna talk about? I know I haven't been exactly the best friend of late, but I'm still your friend, Xander."

Considering it a moment, he turned to her and frowned. It wasn't exactly a feeling, but he knew there was just something he couldn't tell her. But if anyone would be able to understand, it would be her.

"Have you ever had dreams of portent? Have you ever felt that you were trapped by your destiny? That nothing you say or do can change what will come and you aren't exactly sure you want to?"

"Yes." Her voice was low, sluggish from deep seeded emotions.

"I suppose the moment you became active, you felt like you weren't even human anymore."

Unaware the effect his words were having on Buffy, Xander snorted. "You're a freak. No one is meant to have that kinda power, no one mortal that is. You aren't a god, people aren't meant to decide who lives and dies."

"No," she closed her eyes, "they're not."

"They want to control you, manipulate you for their own ends. But you got your own plans. This is your life, they can't just destroy your hopes and dreams!" Clenching his fists, Xander shook his head. This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. He wasn't supposed to burden her with all this. They were just kids. "But who are you to say what is right? They've been around a lot longer than you have, and who knows? Just because you got the power doesn't mean you know squat about how to use it."

"That is why they are here, that is why you are here." Buffy stepped up closer, grabbing his hand in her own. "You help keep me stable, alive."

Taking his hand back, Xander stared down her. "I wasn't talking about you."

"Oh?" At his head shake, she sighed. She wanted to reach up and move the hair off his face, but knew he would block her attempt. He was wire tight, close to snapping. Trying to lighten the mood, she glanced at him for anything to use. "I didn't know you had blue eyes."

"Before the melange, I didn't. Blue on Blue eyes is the sign of spice addiction." Cracking a smile, he quickly reached up and flicked her earring. "But hey, it has some great side effects that more than make up for the eye change." There was no need to tell her just what those were. It would all become clear soon enough. "Listen, how about we meet back up here before going out to slay tonight? After hitting a few cemeteries we'll go to the Bronze. Just you, me, and Willow."

"Okay." There was nothing else to say. She wanted her friend back, and if he wasn't willing to completely open up, what he already said would have to suffice. Nodding, she headed back for the
Well, okay." Smiling distantly, Xander watched her go until she disappeared in the building. Adjusting his shoulder straps, he turned and headed for the other side of town. He had a sand man to visit before he came back.

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Xander was slammed back against the wall, Angel pinning him there with his body, hands roaming down the young man's sides. His mouth full of tongue and vampire fangs, Xander moaned. God, it felt better than he had imagined. Sucking on the vampire's tongue, he wrapped his arms around Angel's neck.

At the touch, some form of sense returned to Angel and he released Xander's mouth. Sagging against the gasping young man, he pressed their foreheads together. "We shouldn't be doing this. You came to me for help, not sex."

"I came to you for a place to stay." Shaking from the force of a deep breath, Xander squeaked in exhausted amusement. Grinning at the vampire, he pecked him on the lips. "You were the one who said I could share your bed."

"I thought you needed my help! I was being polite, not making a pass at you." Growling at the impudent Xander, Angel pushed him back against the wall. "Don't. Kiss. Me."

"Or what?" Sliding his hand down the back of Angel's body, he slipped it under the vampire's black pants to rest on the top of his ass. Arousal clearly visible in his actions, he pulled Angel's hips against his own. "You know I'm never one to listen to a word you say."

"What are we doing?" Grinding his body in to Xander, Angel pressed his lips to Xander's neck. He couldn't figure out how this started or how to break it up. The touch of the young man sent warmth through his cold body and he didn't want it to end. In a sudden urge, he snapped Xander's head to the side and pressed his face to the boy's neck. His teeth were a hare's breath from piercing skin before he stopped.

Freezing, Angel released Xander and jumped back. "This is wrong!" He frowned in confusion and backed away from Xander's out reaching arms. "Don't. Just don't. I can't control myself with you touching me."

"Then don't control yourself, let it out." Reaching up, Xander drew his tee-shirt over his head. He flexed his few muscles while tossing the shirt to the way side. Stepping up to Angel faster than the vampire could back away, he grabbed Angel's hands and placed them on his body. "Take what you want, I want it too!"

"Don't offer this, Xander, you don't know what it is that you give." He was silenced as Xander's hands traced up the front of his pants stopping at the waist band. When one of them slipped under the elastic band and slid down his body to grip his cock, Angel lowered his head and gasped. "Oh god, please don't, Xander. This is...it won't end well."

"Give in to me, Angel. I want you, all of you." Pressing his body up against Angel, he inhaled the scent of fading musk. The smell made him groan in need. "Please, don't make me beg you. I don't beg well, sides, it's never pretty."

Angel dazedly lowered his face to Xander's shoulder. Slowly losing his grip on the inner demon, he
let go. He first tasted Xander with a kiss on the shoulder proper. Moving up the skin, he pressed another to the junction between the neck and shoulder. Fangs descending, he whispered against Xander's skin. "I love you."

Then Xander felt the sting of fangs piercing his neck.

Crying out, Xander rolled over in bed. Glancing at the alarm clock, he noted the time. It was only six-thirty, time to get up so he could go slaying tonight. "Shit!" Scrubbing the dried tear tracks from around his eyes, he reluctantly sat up in bed.

Rubbing at his neck, he could still feel the sharpness of Angel's teeth in his skin. What the hell had he been eating to cause that kind of dream? It was bad enough thinking he was on some alien planet planning a war. This sex dream was just one step too weird.

He may think the guy was kinda cute, but he wasn't going to the guy for a place to stay, much less a quick screw. That would be like a mouse asking the cat if it could check its teeth. Despite his objectional horror at the dream, he noticed with dismay that his pants were tented. Despite being eaten, his dream self was still contented to play horny slut even up to the end.

Deciding a quick jerk off was out of the question, Xander slid out of his tangled covers and headed for the door. He checked the hallway for anyone before slipping out the door and going to the bathroom. Inside, he quickly removed his boxers and climbed under the shower head. The heat was great for making his body relax.

The hot water hitting his sensitive erection only served to remind him of the dream. After catching himself actively hugging the wall and humping the hot water stream, he gave in. His body was more than happy to oblige a quick wank in the shower.

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Still slightly embarrassed from the sensual dream and subsequent masturbation fantasy, Xander walked up the steps to the school with his head bowed. There was plenty of other things going on to think about to keep himself distracted from his real problems like having orgasm thinking about Buffy's boyfriend.

Oh yeah, he was going to burn in hell for that one.

Snickering, he looked up at the school. It looked pretty harmless at night, despite the large potential for evil. There was always that. May be one day he would wise up and get the hell away from this place and all the death it represented. May be one day.

Xander pulled the door open and glared at the dark entrance. One day something nasty was going to be waiting for them there and then nothing would save them. All for want of one single light bulb. The entire thing was strategically unsound for any of them.

Shaking his head, he headed inside while keeping his ears open for something. It didn't take long for him to pick up the chatter of a nervous slayer. Feeling like teaching her a lesson, only this time from a distance, he sank to the shadows.

His body slipped silently down the hall, feet not quite touching the ground before lifting again. Time seemed to slow down when he came around the final corner towards the library. In the hall, Buffy and Willow stood laughing at something. Holding the shadows, Xander crept down the hall.

He was thirty feet away from them when a pair of arms came out of an open class room door way and jerked him inside, a hand over his mouth. The distinct scent of Angel's soap permeated his nose
and Xander groaned.

"What do you think you're doing sneaking around like that? You want Buffy to kill you? Are you looking for a fight?" Something occurred to the vampire. "Where's the knife?" Angel's other hand ran over Xander's midsection, down the front of his pants searching for the knife. "I thought you would have learned better after the last time. Yeah, she told me about Halloween morning. So, what's the deal?"

Bucking in to Angel's questing hand, Xander refused to answer. It was none of his business what Xander was up to.

When Angel didn't find the dagger in Xander's pants, he started to pull his hand out. Xander's hand on his wrist stopped him. "What?"

Heart pounding and pulse racing, Xander swallowed. He closed his eyes, mentally going over the Litany Against Fear. When he regained some of his calm, he pushed Angel's arm down further in to his pants.

The strong scent of Xander's arousal grew enough for Angel to recognize over the stench of fear response. It confused him. The reaction of the boy should have been to go on the offensive, not let Angel maintain control. That is what he had come to expect from Buffy's annoying little friend. Flattening his hand, he slipped it through the front of Xander's boxers. "Is this what you want?"

Xander nodded. There was nothing else his body would let him do. He wanted to feel Angel's hands all over him, touching him like they belonged there. When the cool fingers touched his cock, Xander thrust his hips forward in to the hand.

"I'm not doing this, Xander." Angel withdrew his hand from the boy's pants, unconsciously sliding it over his body. "I'm dating Buffy and you're her best friend. That might not mean much to some people, but you'll feel like shit when the excitement wears off. Besides, she's my one shot, I'm not going to blow it on a quickie with a kid like you." Pushing Xander away, Angel stepped around him and headed for the hall. He stopped just inside the doorway to glare at Xander. "Keep it to yourself, I'm not a toy to be shared among friends."

Biting his lip, Xander nodded. "That's just the kind of response I would expect from someone like you." Looking up at the vampire, he cocked his head. "I hope she knows how lucky you are, both of you." Turning around, Xander glanced about the class room for an exit. Nothing but windows too small to open stood between him and freedom.

Angel wanted to say something more to him. It felt wrong to leave things at that. He'd had an inclination of the boy's desire in the past, but until now, it been something he could ignore. Had he been a little less scrupulous and a little more demon, he wouldn't have thought twice to take the boy up on his offer and over the teacher's desk. As it stood, he was already in a committed relationship with Buffy.

And that was the crux of the matter.

"Buffy, Xander's here!" Angel knew he would pay for it by the way the boy whirled on him at his words. Before Xander could act, Buffy and Willow were coming up behind Angel.

"Hey, Xander, glad you could make it." Glancing about the room, Buffy smiled. "So, what's up with you and the dark class room thing? Feel like being all 'terror that flaps in the night'?"

"You know me, Buff, always looking for new ways to impress you." Holding up the edge of his
shirt over his face, he wiggled his eyebrows. Her giggle in response eased the tension inside him. "Are we ready to go, yet?"

"As ready as you are, Dark Wing." Bowing slightly, she gestured towards the hall. "After you."

"Thank you." Walking passed her with a regal baring, he glared at Angel. "Dead Boy."

Xander launched himself in the air over the tombstone. He came down face first on the back of a vampire attacking Willow. Crysknife out, he slashed downwards cutting the vampire across the chest. A moment later, the vampire turned to dust and Xander's dagger was hidden from sight.

Willow had fallen to the ground after Xander impacted the vampire. Wiping dust from her clothes, she coughed and smiled at Xander. "Thanks."

"Not to worry, Wills, I got your back." He bent over and helped her stand. He wiped the dirt from her bottom with a cheeky grin. "I don't think grass stain goes with that skirt, Willow."

She grinned at him again with a faint blush from him brushing off her skirt. "Thank you, Xander, but I think I can handle that part myself." Feeling that she shouldn't let him take so many liberties with her person, she swatted his hand away. It wasn't that she didn't want his hand there, she knew that it would never be for the reasons she wanted. That was more than enough to discourage too familiar touches.

Some what hurt at her actions, Xander nodded. "Sure, Wills, any time." Pulling back, he glanced around the cemetery for the others. Off to their right, Buffy and Angel were fighting back to back against a half dozen other vampires.

One of the vampires raised Buffy's crossbow from where she had dropped it and took aim at Angel.

Seeing this, Xander didn't hesitate. Focusing his entire concentration on moving fast enough, he shot off across the cemetery to reach the vampire, Crysknife drawn. Running, he felt the world zip past him and sooner than he thought possible, he was at the vampire's side. With a half twist, he brought the knife down in an under handed cutting arc.

The head of the vampire fell from his body as he turned to dust. Buffy's crossbow fell to the ground harmlessly.

Not waiting to see his handiwork in action, Xander darted towards the next vampire in reach. He slammed the dagger through the back of the vampire in to its heart and pulled it out as the demon fell to dust. Spinning around, he sliced off the hand of a third vampire. Grabbing it by the stump, he flipped the blade and stabbed it in the chest.

As the third vampire fell to dust, Xander stood huffing glancing about for another target. All that remained was a shocked looking Buffy, a slightly angry Angel, and a scared Willow. Putting the dagger out of their site, he replaced it in the sheath and down the back of his pants. He tried to appear casual and bobbed his head. "All done."

Crossing her arms, Buffy gave a look that she knew said she wasn't having any of it. This was going to be had out then and there. "What are you?"

Sighing, Xander let the carefree expression drop. Holding his hands at his side in preparation to run, he cocked his head. "I'm me. That me would be the guy who just saved your life."
"Well that means you're still Xander, but leaves the question of are you Human?" Glaring at him, she let her own body react to his stance. If he was going to run, she was damn sure going to catch him and have this out. "Well, I'm waiting."

Xander opened his mouth to reply. Just as he went to speak a high pitched screech filled his ears and he cried out. Through tearing eyes, he noticed the others weren't even reacting. The pressure in his head becoming too great, Xander turned and fled the source of the sound as fast as he could.

Unfortunately for Buffy, he just disappeared as far as she could tell. One moment he was there, the next his entire body just seemed to disappear in a burst. Taking a step forward to balance herself, Buffy glanced about her. "Where did he go?"

"I dunno, I didn't see!" Willow, just now rushing up to Buffy and Angel, held her hat in confusion. "What happened, Buffy? What did you say to him?"

"I just asked what he was. He was about to respond when he just flipped out and disappeared." Switching from her friend, Buffy looked to Angel. "Did you see where he went?"

Angel shook his head. "He moved too fast, I couldn't keep track of him." Picking up Buffy's crossbow, he handed to Willow. "Take this back to Giles and tell him what happened. Buffy, escort her back. I'm going after Xander, see if I can't pick up his smell."

"Wait a minute, you're not going after him like some blood hound. Angel, are you listening to me?" Buffy took a step towards her boyfriend only to find him ignoring her completely. "Angel!"

"Buffy, please. Someone has to protect Willow and I am the only one who can smell him. If I don't go now, I will lose the trail." Waving off her reach for him, he moved off in the direction Xander had gone.

"Angel! Wait!" Following her boyfriend, she tried to keep up until the edge of the cemetery when she lost him in the shadows. "Damn it, Angel!" Slowly dropping off in speed until she came to a complete stop, she looked down. Forcing herself to get over it for now, she did an about face and headed back to Willow.

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Just passed SunnyDale's out lying housing projects, three men in black robes walked across the sand. Their path was unclear, but the destination was evident. Rising up from the desert floor was a large rock of glowing crystal. With them they carried the trappings of a ritual; including candles, ritual oils, mixing bowl, chicken quartered, eleven herbs and spices, and the spell book.

Donny Reagan was in the lead, his beer gut hanging over the tight belt. He smiled over his shoulder at Rick Denny and Mark Reinhold. They had been studying for months and the time was now right to get what they figured they had coming to them.

Tonight they would summon the Morah Demon and have it instill in them the power of success. What they lacked in normal life they would get from black magic. The chicken and spices were necessary to summon the demon, Donny hadn't quite gotten around to figuring out why.

Upon reaching the rock, Mark lit a fire in the magical hearth and placed the bowl over it. Dumping the ritual oil in the bowl, he began to chant the ritual of summoning.

Rick and Donny mixed the herbs and spices before sticking the chicken in it like the book said to. Reading the book, Donny glared at it. "Place chicken in to ritual oil and cover with lid." Grabbing the lid for the bowl from Mark, he stuck it on the bowl and stepped back. "Now we begin the chant."
"Come to me. Come to me. Come to me." When nothing happened, they looked at each other then to Rick.

Donny put his hands on his hips and glared at Rick. "Where exactly did you get that damn book?"

"My wife's sister, dumb ass! I've told you half a dozen fucking times, does anything ever penetrate that thick fucking skull?" Pulling out a flask, Rick took a swig of the cheap wine inside and grimaced.

"If you weren't Marie's brother, I would knock the shit stuffing right out of you!" Grabbing the younger man by the collar, Mark pointed at the bowl. "Does that smell familiar to you?"

Mark sniffed it and blanched. "That's original crispy! God damn it! How stupid can you be, Ricky?"

"Idiots! No wonder you two never graduated high school!" Reaching in to the herb sack, Donny pulled out the stone toad that had been mixed in with them. He was about to toss it in the desert when the Earth shook. "What was that?"

Mark ignored him in favor of sniffing the air. Grimacing, he turned on Donny. "Did you put Cinnamon in that? I know this ritual shit was a total bust, but least we could do was eat the fuckin chicken. But I'm not gonna eat it if you put Cinnamon in the shit. That don't taste right, it just don't."

"No, I didn't put Cinnamon in it." Sniffing the air, Donny had to admit it did smell like someone had put Cinnamon in the chicken mix. Turning to the only one it could have been, he glared at his brother in law. "Did you fuck up the spices again like you did at last year's barbq? He mixed horse radish with pineapple and used it to marinade the chicken. No one could eat it because it stank so bad."

Rick flipped him off as he leaned back against the crystal arm. "Don't fuckin lie to me, Dicky, you ate the shit out of it!" Lighting up a cigarette, he blew out a puff. He took another swig of the flask and glared at Donny. "Sides, you were the dumb ass that mixed the herbs and spices, I was just supposed to get the oil and chicken. That is one hundred percent pure virgin olive oil, not god damned Cinnamon."

The ground's tremor began to increase noticeably, except for the three men who were too busy arguing.

"Go fuck yourself, idiot!" Donny stomped over and took the flask from Rick. "Give me that, you moron."

Standing on the crystal rock observing the three men fighting, a gray skinned figure glared at them. It debated answering their summons, but decided to wait until they were sufficiently distracted before taking the offering and disappearing. Just as it was about to jump down, the Earth shook and a distant roaring began to vibrate the crystal. The moan was so deep it hurt the ears of the sensitive Morah demon.

By now the sand began to swirl around the crystal formation and the three men fell to their knees. The Morah demon fell down from its perch beside them, clutching its head. Blasts of sand shot up all around the crystal formation before the entire structure disappeared. Almost as quickly as it began, the entire event was over, and the sand began to settle down.

Where the crystal formation had been now only remained sand and a ritual bowl of Kentucky Fried Chicken.
Buffy entered the library, throwing the doors open out of her way. Glaring at the stack of books in the center of the table, she groaned internally. That stack meant only one thing, Giles was on a study kick. However, she was surprised by the person behind the stack as she grew close enough to see around them. "Ms. Calendar, what are you doing here?"

"Looking for references to Spice." Continuing to flip through the pages and scanning the words, she only waved at Buffy in acknowledgement. "So far my search of all the books I have has been for not. I brought in my collection out of storage, but there are thousands of books. It would be easier if I had the hard drive I uploaded them to with the scanner, but I seemed to have lost it. That means I have to go through each one by hand."

"Okay." Buffy was a little weirded out by her teacher. Setting her bag down in a chair since there was no room on the table, she glanced about the library. "Is Giles in?"

"No, he's out at a crime scene." Since she was focused on the book, Jenny missed Buffy's raised eyebrows. Sighing with disgust, she dropped the book in the bin that was beside her and grabbed another off the table. "If you wouldn't mind, I would be glad for the help. I can't help but feel whatever is going on will only get worse if we don't figure this thing out and fast."

"What thing?" In alarm, Buffy grabbed a book and opened the cover. When she noticed the words weren't in coherent English, she set it back down and grabbed another. "What are these books? I can't understand anything, it looks like a printer malfunction. For example, there is only one E in the."

"That is Thee, it means you, a form of old English. Grab something with a paper back cover, the hard backs are mostly from my college days. I was a lit minor." Flipping through the last page, Jenny sighed. Her head and eyes ached from the constant strain of trying to find the book. "Damn it, I know I read that book some where! Perhaps it isn't in this section." Standing, she smiled at Buffy. "Hold down the fort, I'm going to make a few calls."

"Okay. This is me holding down the fort. The fort won't get away from me." Pressing down on the stack of books, Buffy smirked. Her smirk disappeared when the table groaned and she jumped back. "Okay, so not literally."

"Thank you. I'll be right back." Jenny was already deciding what she was going to say before she reached the doors.

Watching her go, Buffy shook her head. That woman was in desperate need of a life. She had already tried to suck Buffy in, if she wasn't careful, one of these days she would wind up a book nerd shackled to the library desk willingly going through these books. Just like....

"I tried a web search like you suggested, Ms. Calendar, but all I could come up with were thousands of references to Cinnamon and this flashy group called the Spice Girls. It's not like they are that pretty or that good, but their hit song is directly linked with at least twelve demonic rituals.... Oh, Buffy!" Willow put down the lap top beside her on the book return and smiled at her best friend. "Where is Ms. Calendar?"

"Hey, Willow, nice to see you too." Buffy smirked at her friend's blush. This was going to be a little fun after all. "When did you get sucked in to the seething mass of Ms. Calendar's search for condiments?"

"Spice, Buffy, it is spice." Pointing at the computer, she tried to appear professional. She turned the screen to face Buffy. "This is the only thing I could come up with in the last hour of searching. A quick reference to a demon that smelled of Cinnamon and almonds. It's a Trokla demon, but they are..."
extinct, people tended to, well, eat them. Apparently they are really sweet."

"And ew, that is something I so did not need to know." Shuddering, she tried to shake the idea from her mind. Instead all she could think about were tiny little demonic gummy bears with horns. The idea of them bouncing around made her giggle. "Okay, so not so disgusting. Just really, really weird."

"Yeah. That was pretty strange." Closing the lap top, Willow came around the book return desk and walked up to Buffy. "Did Xander come in today?"

"No, and believe me, I looked every where. He just isn't going to show unless we make him." Buffy sat there dejected for a bit before something occurred to her. "Oh, hey, where's Giles? Ms. Calendar said he went to a crime scene. Is there something I should know?"

"Yeah! That reminds me. I also ran another search." Willow bent over the table, pushing aside books. Her search returned a newspaper buried under a large stack of thick leather books. "Here, give me a hand with these, I can't get them by myself."

"Sheesh, is that all I am to you, someone to lift heavy things, open pickle jars, and slay vampires?" Pretending to be mock hurt, she picked up the books and set them on the chair next to them.

"Oh, no Buffy, you can also reach things up on high too." At Buffy's wide eyed look, Willow slapped her on the arm. "Kidding! You are so gullible some times."

"Thanks, I feel much better now. Show me what is so important before I decide to show you how much better." Together they opened up the news paper and flipped through all the mindless nattering done by clueless reporters to the crime section, which was thicker than the rest of the paper combined. "Man, with a police report section like this, you'd think that people would have paid more attention by now."

"Not really, this is unusual, Buffy. There are a lotta people missing, more than usual demonic activity missing." Pulling the pages out, she held it up for Buffy to look at. Pictures of missing people covered the front page. "So far forty-six people missing since Monday."

"Wait, that was two days after Halloween." Grabbing the paper, she scanned the missing reports and compared them with what she knew the dates were. "How does this and what Giles is doing come together?"

"Giles is investigating one of the disappearances. So far no one knows where exactly these people disappeared at, but one of them is extremely visible." Flipping through the pages in Buffy's hands to the tenth, she pointed at a picture. The desert floor was completely covered in broken and mangled camping gear. "A group of fourteen men and seven women up from L.A. went out for a night of partying Monday. By this morning the police were looking for them."

"Do we know what happened? I mean all it gives are personal details of the people, not of the scene." Scanning the page, she tried to compare it to what she knew. Nothing came to mind.

"That is what Giles is trying to figure out. There are strange markings in the sand that suggest something came out of it, dragged something across the ground for a bit, then went back below it." Willow shook her head. It was a shame that people were dying, but what was worse is that she had no idea why. On top of that, the worry over her Xander was making her feel so sick she couldn't even eat breakfast that morning.

However, Buffy was lost in a world of her own. The picture of one of the missing people from L.A.
was frighteningly familiar to her. Dropping the paper on the table, she grabbed her bag. "Uh, look, Willow, if you see Giles, tell him I am on this. I'm going out to hit on a few leads before I go slaying in a few hours. But right now, I gotta get home, Mom is breathing down my neck about something new in her life. So, I'll see you around, tomorrow, or Sunday, or Monday may be. Bye!"

Buffy was out the door before Willow could even come up with a single reply. She didn't know what to make of her friend's sudden departure, it just didn't make sense. Glancing down at the paper, she tried to find something that made Buffy react the way she had, but it just didn't come.
"I'll teach you agony, remember that as you fight.
You'll have agony such as will make,
the gom jabbar a happy memory by,
comparison. You will writhe…"
- The Lady Jessica to Jaimis.

Chantarelle ran down the back alley, her tears clogging her eyes. It wasn't supposed to be this way. They were all supposed to be part of the undead, creatures of the night, gothic, poetic, dangerous. Now they were all gone, it was just her to tell the story, the tragedy of their ill fated group.

Clutching the walls, she shook her head to clear it. They had tried so hard, come so far to reach the one who could grant their wish for nothing. While sleeping under the stars one last time while she and Ford had scouted the town for a new lair, the camp had been attacked. When they got back, all Ford could rant about was how his plans were ruined. He didn't even care that their friends were gone.

After he had hit her across the face for accusing him of using them, she had run off. Now here it was a day later, and she was still looking for someone to help her. It had taken most of the day to walk to the town. She just had to get someone to help her.

Wiping her face clean with her puffy sleave, she headed towards the bright light of what she assumed was main street. Hopefully it wouldn't be just another back alley that lead to a dead street. There had to be someone awake even now.

Heading down the alley carefully, she stepped out in to the light. The street was empty like all the rest. Giving up, she slipped down the curb. Hanging her head, she fought down the urge to cry out.

"Well, well, well, look what we have here." Coming up the street from out of the shadows, a vampire in a black track suit smirked at Chantarelle. His slicked back hair shined in the street lamp. "Come on over here, sugar and let daddy take care of all your sorrows."

"No thanks, I'm thinking of converting to lesbianism." Strolling out from under a street lamp, Buffy played with her stake, twirling it like a small baton. Her face twisted in to a grimace at the sight of the vampire. "Oh gross, don't any of you people have a fashion sense?"

"Fuck off, ya little bitch." Cracking his knuckles, he pulled out a pair of brass knuckles. "Daddy is gonna teach you stupid little bitches about back talking your elders."

"And you wonder why so many kids these days are so disrespectful." Suddenly appearing under the street lamp behind Chantarelle, Angel lifted his head and smirked. "Then again, you kids are smart mouthed too."

The vampire hesitated at the sight of Angel and Buffy. "You're that disgusting traitor, ain't ya? Angelo, the twisted spawn of Daria."

"Oh, now he's done it." Crossing her arms, Buffy stopped and leaned back against the wall. Shaking her head, she blew out a breath slowly. "I woulda done you quickly, but you had to insult my boyfriend. He really doesn't like it when people make fun of his name."

"No, I don't." Stepping away from the lamp, Angel pulled out a short sword. Smiling as he twirled the blade, he tried not to appear too enthusiastic. "You should have just stayed in Vegas, Bruno.
Spike doesn't need the help and you're all out of lady luck."

"Angel, baby, can't we come to a deal?" Backing away, Bruno glanced about for assistance. His boys shouldn't have been too far behind him.

"Looking for these?" Buffy reached in to her jacket and pulled out a hand full of gold rings with ruby stones. "They are all on their way to hell, which is a bitch considering here in SunnyDale there is such a long line to get in."

"Fucking whore!" All sense of bravado gone, Bruno turned to run. His actions didn't get him more than a step in the right direction before he fell to dust. As he died, a look of abject terror filled his eyes.

Angel, who had been ready to give chase, halted. Directly ahead of him was a figure swathed in brown robes with a green hooded cloak. Over the face was a mask of what appeared to be brown leather. A glass visor sat on the forehead of the figure's cloak above glowing blue eyes. He had no idea what to make of the figure until he caught the strong scent coming from the person. "Xander? Where have you been?"

"No." Bending over, the figure retrieved a large dagger from the ashes of where Bruno had died. When he stood again, the dagger was gone and in his hand was a pouch. He tossed the pouch to Angel. "For the girl. Tell her Shai-Hulud has cleansed the world of His enemies."

Catching the pouch, Angel glanced down at it. It was nothing out of the ordinary except for the intricate weavings and the scent of Cinnamon on it. When he looked up again, the figure was gone. "Where did he go?" Turning back to Buffy, he found her kneeling next to Chantarelle. "Buffy?"

"I didn't see who you are talking about." Meeting his gaze, she shrugged. "When Bruno took off, I had to catch her. She is a little dehydrated, but other wise fine. That is if you over look the big bruise on her cheek." Making Chantarelle look at her, Buffy frowned. "What happened to you?"

"You're Buffy?" Hope returned to her as she clutched at the Slayer. "You'll protect me, won't you? Ford said you would take care of us, but then he said a lot of things until the others were gone." Frowning, she touched her sore cheek and winced. "He did this to me when we got back to the camp and found the others gone."

"You were with the others? Do you know what happened? Where is Ford?" When Chantarelle only shook her head, Buffy let her go and turned to Angel. "He's still alive out there, Angel, and I have to find him before he is killed too!"

"You can't!" Holding on to Buffy, Chantarelle tried to make her stay. "He doesn't care about you or anyone else. He was going to use you, use us all to become a vampire. He told me that we ruined his plan by dying before he wanted us too." Laughing despite the tears, she snorted. "They inconvenienced him with their deaths."

Walking up to them, Angel handed Buffy the pouch. "He said to give this to you." At her confused look, he gestured over his shoulder with a thumb. "He killed Bruno, tossed me this pouch, said it was for you, then disappeared."

"Gee, I wonder why that sounds familiar." Snorting, she took the pouch. Pulling open the draw strings, she turned it over to dump the contents in her open palm. Out fell a large man's class ring. Glancing at it, she blinked at Angel. "Why would he give this to me? I don't recognize it."
"I do." Snickering hysterically, she took the ring with shaky fingers. Turning it over so Buffy could see the inscription around the gem stone, she nearly dropped it. "It was Ford's. It wouldn't come off his finger because he had pumped up. He once said," she giggled again, this time with tears, "they would have to cut it off to remove it. Guess he wasn't lying for once in his life."

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Glancing around him, Xander tightened the green cloak about him. The hood hid his identity from the other patrons of Willy's Bar, while the strong smell of spice masked his scent. If ever there was a time when he was glad to be different, now was that. It wasn't like he couldn't defend himself against any of the other patrons, he just didn't want to get in to any unnecessary fights with demons. That would completely blow his cover.

For the past day he had been searching for a purpose to it all. His happy little life of being best male friend and side kick to the Slayer was gone. The war with evil had just gotten a whole lot shakier on his part. He knew he was a freak, he also knew that he was a dangerous freak.

His skills and knowledge made him a deadly weapon in the wrong hands. That same skills and knowledge was why he was here in the first place. He hated what he had become, he just wanted to be normal again. Xander figured that if Superman had that crystal chamber, there had to be a magical equivalent for him.

Stepping up to the bar, Xander set down a twenty dollar bill he had taken from a vampire who no longer had a need for earthly possessions. When Willy didn't automatically come over, he drew out the back up dagger and jammed it in to the bar. Nothing got the weasel moving faster than damage to his place.

Stepping over with a towel over one shoulder, Willy glared up at Xander. "Hey, watch the stuff, asshole... Hey, I was just kidding, let's all place nice." He held up his arms to placate Xander as he was dragged across the bar to come face to face with a pair of bluing eyes. "What's goin on, kid?"

"A week ago, a spell was cast." Twisting the demon snitch's lapels, Xander forgot to restrain his strength and the cloth began to tighten and rip. "I was caught up in the effects. Now I want to know what I can do to reverse it. You are going to find out or I am going to get very unpleasant."

"Whoa, hold on there. I may do some information brokering, but I ain't no dummy. You are talkin some high class chaos magics, that is out of my league." His shirt was tightened until he found it hard to breath.

"Blinking will soon be out of your league." Shifting off to his right made Xander draw the dagger out of the bar and sling it through the face of a near by demon. "Do not interfere!" His anger going off the scale, Xander began to strangle Willy. "I want to be normal again! Find out how or I will paint the sand with your blood! You have two days!" With a final twist of his collar, Xander tossed Willy back against the wall.

Just as Willy impacted, the door to his bar opened. A figure in a black duster stood in the entrance, a cigarette in his hand. Surveying the scene about him, he took a drag from the cigarette. "Well, what have we here?"

Walking towards the door, Xander jerked his dagger from the head of the dead demon and wiped it on the clothes of another.

Spike sniffed the air and snorted. "Bugger, who's the bloody poof with the pot pourri fetish?" As Xander came near and the other demons in the bar scattered out of his way, Spike only raised an eye
brow. "You some sort of bad...." Then he was tossed across the alley towards another building.

"You're in my way." Xander replaced the dagger under his cloak. Checking the time on his watch, he sighed. He had an hour before his mother got home and he still had dishes to do. Squaring his shoulders, he stalked off down the street towards home.

Spike shook his jaw to make sure it was still completely attached. The bugger had hit him with an undercut that tossed him thirty feet. If it hadn't been for that nice wall, he probably would have gone even further. Not even those nasty little slayers could do that. Few demons he knew could do that. Eyeing where the figure had disappeared, he rubbed at his head and back. "Well, pet, what are we going to do with you?"

Chantarelle glanced down at the torn and stained clothes in her hands. It was hard to believe that these had been hers just hours ago. That felt like an entire life time to her now. Meeting a real vampire had opened her eyes to the hazards of letting the dream take over. Or may be it had just ended the fantasy of becoming something better by embracing the darkness, she wasn't really sure.

Letting the clothes fall in to the trash can, she smiled. It was a foolish dream, but a dream none the less. Bending down, she picked up the bag of clothes the nice girl Buffy had given her. It was almost time for her to get on the bus and head back to L.A. and a possible new life.

There were things she could do there that weren't possible in this small town. She was going to get a place and a job when she got there, one that paid enough for her to save a little. When she got enough money she planned on going to a night college or something. Smiling over the future, she headed for the bus for boarding.

On the outskirts of the bus depot, Buffy stood with her back to Angel's chest. Pain evident in her features, she shivered in her jacket. "Do you suppose that she will be all right, Angel?"

"Who knows. We've done all we can, the rest is up to her." Wrapping his arms around the Slayer, he rest his head on her shoulder. "How are you doing? After hearing his plans, it must have been a shock. I mean he was your friend, right?"

"Yeah, but I'm over it." Feeling her resolve harden, Buffy clenched her fists. "Next time I see him, he's getting a face full of fist. Watch out Ford, you better pray we don't meet again."

After following the scent of Cinnamon through the alley ways and down long streets, Spike lost the trail in a dead end alley. He wasn't stupid enough to go in without checking it over first. That was why he was on the roof over looking it now.

Movement in the alley drew his attention to a figure scuffling with a trash can lid. "Having a little trouble with our dinner, are we?"

The man kicked the can when he couldn't get the lid off. "God damn it, open up you piece of shit. I want my clothes!" Kicking the side of the trash can, Ford made a dent in the shiny, silver metal. When that failed to produce the desired results, he turned around and slammed his booted foot in to the side of the trash can. That time there was enough force and the lid popped off. "Yes!"

Spinning around, he reached down inside to draw out his gym bag, but winced when he used the right hand. Pulling out the bloody clothed hand, he shook off the pain. Having a finger cut off for a ring really sucked. Even worse was being left for dead in front of that god damned giant snake. He
never did thank that guy on the motorcycle who had stopped to see why he was running. Then again, hard to thank someone who was eaten by a giant snake.

This time, using his left hand, he pulled out the gym bag. He set it down on the next can and unzipped it. Reaching in the bag, he pulled out a 9mm glock and cocked it. "Hello, sweet heart, I've missed you. Looks like you and me are going to get that bitch the old fashioned way."

"And which bitch would that happen to be? This being the vacation spot it is, there certainly are a lot of them." Coming up the alley, cigarette lit, Spike smirked at the young man. He blew smoke from his nostrils in an attempt to look meaner. "Well, precious, I'm waiting?"

Pointing his gun at Spike, Ford smirked. "Oh, am I supposed to be scared of you?"

"Oh please, like that little toy could even hurt me." Spike was about to toss his cigarette aside when Ford fired. Stopping all movement, he looked down at the bullet hole in his chest. "Ow. That hurt!"

"Well there are plenty more where that came from." Firing again, he shot Spike in the shoulder. Before he could get off a third shot, the gun was ripped from his hand and he was lifted off the ground.

Spike shifted to game face as he choked the life out of the boy. "Oh, you are going to regret that, meat!"

Above the alley, Xander turned his back on the screaming Ford and walked away.

Buffy lead Angel by the arm towards the library for a little post hit man slaying celebration. Smiling at him over her shoulder, she missed the vampires coming towards them until they actually ran into each other. "Whoa! Where's the fire?"

"Move it, it's the slayer bitch!" Taking the book from her downed companion, who was knocked over by the collision with Buffy, the female vampire ran for it. Her hair flew wildly in a way she knew would be a pain in the ass to fix later, but all that mattered was she get away with the book.

Buffy flipped herself to her feet as she saw the female vampire take off. "Angel, you handle klutzy, I'll go after his bimbo girl friend. Meet me back at my place."

Before Angel could respond, Buffy was already gone. Standing there, he pulled out a stake and stabbed the vampire in the chest as he climbed to his feet. As the dust settled, he waved it off. "Well that was disappointing."

Buffy silently tracked the blonde vampire through the alleys towards what she knew would be the lair of Spike. If anyone was stealing books from Giles' library, she knew it would be that bad dye job. After another bend in the alley, she was rewarded with the sight of the vampire bimbo heading in to an old warehouse. "How predictable."

"I completely agree."

Buffy spun, but not fast enough to avoid the punch that slammed her head first in to a wall.

Standing over the unconscious slayer, Drusilla shook her head while clicking her tongue. "Naughty Goldie Locks shouldn't be snooping around the three bears. It's not nice to stick your nose in their
porridge. It'll get chopped off!" Tilting her head to the side, she glared at the minion. "Take her inside, my Spike will enjoy her."

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"Oh, Drusilla, I'm home!" Closing the door to his ware house, Spike stopped to burp. Frowning, he pulled something from his teeth and flicked it aside. "Nasty little bugger." After torturing the impudent little mortal, he had eaten him, literally to an extent. Spike glanced about the furnished warehouse for his lover. "Dru? Are you here?"

"Spike!" Coming down the stairs, Drusilla trailed her hair back over her shoulder and lowered the brush. "Did my Spike have fun tonight?"

"Oh yeah, baby, lots of fun. Even got a bite to eat." Spike stepped over to meet her at the bottom of the stairs. Watching her take the last steps, he grinned up at her. "He wasn't much, got a bit stuck in my teeth even."

"Bad boy, you'll ruin your supper." Drusilla's hand slipped out, rubbing the back of her brush along his cheek. Posing seductively, chest thrust forward, she pouted at him. "I've got a present for you, my sweet. The mouse was squeaking about, didn't notice the cat until too late." She tapped him across the cheek. "But then you've already played this game twice before."

Taking her hand, he turned it over and kissed the palm. "Sweet Drusilla, my goddess, my everything, what would I do without you?" His voice contained nothing but reverence for her. Climbing the step to stand beside her, he pressed their foreheads together. "What... have you been up to, love?"

"Shhhh, it's a secret." Giggling, she pressed a finger to his lips. Slowly, she dragged it down his face, neck and over his shoulder to end up wrapping it around his hand. "The mouse struggles to get free, but the cat knows more knots than nots." Her eyes half lidded in amusement, she lead him up the stairs. "I hope you like it, I saw it and could only think of you."

"The suspense is killing me, pet." Goosing her, he jumped back to avoid her hair brush. "A little faster before I get the urge to have you here on the steps in front of the help."

"Perhaps the present can wait." Sighing in pleasure, she wrapped her arms around his neck. "I've grown so tired of resting, Spike. Don't make me rest like beauty, I don't want to wait a hundred years for my prince to come."

"Patience, Dru, I have the minions out scouring for that Du Lac book as we speak." Kissing her, he pressed her back against the arm rails. Suddenly he let her mouth go and turned his head to smile prettily at the slayer. "So you're the mouse. Dru, is there something you wanted to tell me?"

Buffy back handed Drusilla over the arm rail with her left hand while drawing her stake with the right. "I let my guard down, don't worry, it won't happen again."

"That makes two of us!" Spike returned her gesture, bouncing her off the steps. When she jumped to avoid his next blow, he hit the metal steps and cried out in pain. "Hold still, you bitch!"

There were times in her life Buffy was glad she could tolerate a lot of pain, because dying at the hands of this peroxidized villain's hands was just one embarrassment she would never recover from. Then again, dying was nothing to recover from either. Rolling over, she avoided Spike's lunge. When he landed, she kicked him through the arm rails to land on top of the standing Drusilla.

"Sorry, love, she pushed me." Standing, Spike dusted off Drusilla and helped her to her feet. "Gotta go kick some ass. Oh, by the way, love the present." With one last kiss, he rushed around the stairs
to intercept Buffy as she ran down them. He braced to catch her. However a knife to the back made him scream in pain.

Drusilla, seeing a figure in a green cloak stabbing her Spike with a white dagger, launched herself at him with a scream. Finger nails like claws, she tried to slice the skin from his body, but his movements were too fast for her to land a blow he didn't block. Growing desperate, she feinted left, and drove her right knee up in to his groin. When he doubled over, she hit him with a right hook that sent him flying.

"Way to go, Dru!" Spike removed the white dagger from his back and most of the pain left him. Falling to his knees, he didn't see Buffy until she was kicking his head to an odd angle, breaking his neck.

Picking up the dagger, she admired the work on it. Stepping over the prone Spike, she headed for the inner heart of the warehouse. She still had to find the missing book. Glancing over her shoulder, she spared the man in the green cloak a passing thought before moving on.

Drusilla found herself flying back against the wall of the warehouse. She impacted with a pained grunt, crying out in pain as she slid to the ground.

Standing over her, the figure, now without his facial hood and mask which were still clutched in Drusilla's hand, he stared coldly down upon her. "What form of demon are you?" He produced a knife from his cloak and pressed it to her throat. "Do not lie to me, I will not hesitate to cut your throat."

"Help me, Spike!" Whimpering, Drusilla tried to lift her hand to defend herself only to find it wouldn't move. "Spike!"

Kneeling, he drew the blade slowly over her throat. "Answer me!"

"Get your hands off her!" Angel kicked the kneeling man in the ribs, sending him flying across the room. Kneeling in front of Drusilla to take his place, Angel ran a hand over her face. "Shhh, it's okay, calm down, Drusilla."

Blinking through the tears, Drusilla grinned at him. "My sweet Angel, you've come back to me."

"No, Dru. You're not safe yet." After stroking her face once more, he looked over to see where the man had landed. He was only partially surprised to see the man gone. "I want you to get Spike and leave town, don't return!"

"I can't move my arm, Daddy. The bad man, he hurt me, I think he broke my arm. Ms. Edith won't be pleased with this." She lifted her good arm over to move her broken arm. Shaking it, she frowned. "What a curious sensation. I don't like this feeling, not at all."

"That's fine, Drusilla, just do as I said! If you stay, it won't end well!" Standing, Angel spun on his heel and stalked over to where Spike was glaring up at him, head completely turned around on his shoulders. Smirking, he tapped him with the toe of his shoe. "I told you something bad would happen if you messed with the slayer, boy."

After having found the book room, Buffy quickly set to work locating Giles' missing book. She now knew it was written by a guy named Du Lac, or it was about this guy Du Lac from Spike's own words. Hearing a commotion on the other side of he room, Buffy spun to attack. As she moved, she knocked a candle off its pedestal in to the books. Within seconds the entire stack was on fire and it was spreading to the rest of the room.
"Oooops." Buffy rushed from the room in to Angel's waiting arms. "Angel! What are you doing here?"

"I was coming to help you. I heard fighting and busted in. Where are you going?" Sniffing the air, he glanced towards the way she came. "Let me guess, you didn't get the book?"

"Nope, but neither will anyone else. Let's go." Dragging the reluctant Angel by the arm, Buffy headed for the exit.

Angel glanced one last time towards where he had left Drusilla and Spike only to find them gone. He hoped she had gotten out, the blond he couldn't give a damn about.

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Saturday morning dawned bright and early for Buffy. Unfortunately for the person she was wrapped around, that wasn't a good thing. Angel sat up as the rays came through her blinds and covered himself with her blanket with a curse. Throwing himself and Buffy off the bed, he ducked under it and pulled the covers along with him. He couldn't believe how foolish he had been to let himself get distracted and sleep here with her.

On the one hand, she had been vulnerable in her grief over Xander and Ford, on the other hand, she was becoming worked up over Xander and Ford and needed to be calmed down. Despite his better judgement, he had stayed the night. Now it was after dawn and he was stuck here for the day.

Buffy grumbled as she sat up, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. "Angel. Why'd you...Oh." Noticing the sun, she frowned. "How did we get side tracked?"

"I believe it was between the time you were summoning curses of bodily harm upon Xander for making you worry and then called me shmoopy bear. By the way, I am not a shmoopy bear!"

Peeking through the stuffed animals under her bed, his argument seemed to lack conviction. "As much an undignified position I am in, know that any rebuttal will be harshly dealt with, Buffy."

"Okay, Angel." Rolling her eyes, Buffy climbed up off the floor. With a heavy sigh, she dropped herself on her bed. Buffy grinned at Angel's pained grunt. "Ooops, forgot you were down there."

"This isn't funny, Buffy. What if your mother comes in and finds you talking to yourself? Are you willing to risk the possible mental check up?" Despite his voice being barely audible through the mattress, he knew he made his point. Or at least thought he did.

Laying back, Buffy bounced a little until she found a comfortable position. "I think I am willing to risk it. Besides, I could do with a little vacation from slaying."

"Slaying what, honey?" Opening Buffy's door, Joyce poked her head in with a smile. "I'm glad to see you're up, I was just coming to wake you. Have you been up long?"

"Tests. So am I. No need, already up. And not really, just fell off the bed a moment ago." Smirking at her summary answers, Buffy folded her arms behind her head and bounced twice on the bed. Blinking innocently at her mother, she tried to appear like the good little girl she was supposed to be.

"All right. Well get ready, remember your aunt Eileen from Illinois is going to be here for lunch and I want this place spick and span before she even hits the city limits. Lord knows what she is doing touring the states in a car at her age." Sighing, she shook her head. "All righty, kiddo, hurry up. There's work to be done."
"Mom!" Groaning, Buffy sat up and bounced twice before climbing off the bed. Walking towards the closet, she ignored her mother's questioning look. "A little privacy, please?"

"Oh, right. Ten minutes, Buffy." Closing the door, Joyce wondered what her daughter was doing in her room. No girl her age was up that early without a reason.

Underneath Buffy's bed, Angel watched Buffy slowly undress. His eyes traced her body as she lifted the hem of her night shirt. Just as they were about to reach her bra, Buffy let it drop, much to his disappointment. Next thing he knew there was a large blanket being thrown over his viewing area and he cursed. "Damn."

"I heard that, Mister. Don't make me see just how bright and sunny it is out side." Satisfaction filled her as the toys under her bed shifted to block all sides.

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High above the cliffs over looking the Pacific Ocean, Xander stood watching the waves reflect in the sunlight. The morning air was shrouded in fog from the rising dew. Little droplets of moisture gathered on the edge of his green hood. Xander held still as they ran down the insides towards his face when they had sufficient mass.

So precious.

Feeling light from lack of sleep and too much energy expenditure, he marveled on the beauty of it all. The world was such a fragile thing, the ecosystems, the life, the water, even the very air they breathed held a balance. So much to know, to learn before one could even hope to master it all.

But he didn't want to learn it. He didn't want to master the world. Controlling the people was something he had been born to do, no quarter given to indifference, he would be their instrument. Life called for sacrifice, his was hopes and dreams, that which made him who he was. It would continue to take from him until nothing remained, not even the sorrow.

Man kind wanted a savior. Scratch that, man kind needed a savior, someone to rescue them from themselves. They would be coming for him soon, a tool as important as him would not go unused for long.

Sensing something behind him, Xander broke from his ruminations. Crysknife at the ready, he smiled in anticipation of battle. Battle was something he could do, it took all concentration to succeed, there was no time for morbid thoughts. Adrenalin surged through him and he subtly shifted for an attack stance.

His efforts were in vain as the person behind him wrapped his arms around Xander, placing a dagger to his throat. "You are woefully out of practice, Paul."

"Think again, Duncan." Xander didn't question why he as having the vision of his dead lover and friend, just that he was there was more than enough for him. Crysknife out of use, his back up dagger was poking at the back of his robe held in his free hand. "Seems we die together, old friend."

"Old? Far from that, dukeling." Strong arms tightening around Xander's body, Duncan rubbed them together. His fingers slid down Xander's hips, holding him fast. "There is still life yet in these ancient fingers, enough spark to light a fire within you even, I bet."

"You probably haven't the strength, what with just walking here, you might need a short nap to recover." He giggled when Duncan's hand found a soft spot along his flank. Shrinking away from it, he struck the older man's hand. "Careful, wouldn't want you to tire too soon."
"I'll skin you just for that one!" Stuffing his hand inside Xander's cloak, he came up under his shirt to tickle him. Instead, he stopped to lay his fingers along Xander's ribs. "You've grown fast, Paul, you're much bigger than last time. Think you can handle me."

"Is that a challenge, Duncan?" Suddenly the hands were gone from his body and Xander was left standing in the breeze. "No!" The shock of loss was so quick that he gasped for breath. Falling to his knees, Xander's hands shook as he pulled out another piece of spice candy and stuffed it in his mouth. Chewing it, he tried to achieve the state of calm he had been in, but the depth of his emotions were too massive for him to master. By the time he had calmed down, the vision of Duncan was too far from his memory for him to summon.

Sitting in the sand, watching the waves helplessly, Xander felt his world slip from his grasp again as he was thrown head first once more into life. The same drug that gave him clarity enough to summon phantoms from his mind also kept him flooded with visions enough to distract him. For now, Duncan was lost to him again and a morning's work of meditation was shot to hell.

Sighing in defeat, Xander climbed to his feet and walked back the way he had come.

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It was not beyond him to understand the need for contact with a loved one. In his younger days he had been very affectionate with those he cared about, not that there had been many. Deeply troubled as he had been back then, he knew better now than to be so carefree with his attachments. Rupert Giles knew the value of keeping one's heart from a stranger's hands.

Which was why it was especially hard to give it away.

Staring at Jenny from across the room, Giles knew he should be searching for whatever was killing these people in the Watchers' Diaries. But what he should be doing and what his heart were telling him were two different things. At this very moment all he wanted to do was lean on the desk and watch Jenny as she continued on with her work.

She made him feel alive, unlike he had felt since becoming a Watcher. Her actions fascinated him, the very notion of her being made him feel a part of something grander. Jenny made him feel like Rupert, not just the Giles everyone knew and expected. He must of sighed at that thought because she looked up at him and smiled.

"Is there something the matter, Rupert?" At her words, a blush was the last thing she expected. But then again, he had been mooning after her for the past three hours, ten minutes, twenty-six seconds, so it was not unbelievable.

"Uh, no, nothing's the matter." Her attention diverted to him made him begin to blush again. He felt foolish and tongue tied despite his experience. "Well, there is something I have been meaning to ask."

Putting her book down, Jenny quashed the growing excitement. No need to get the almost icy Brit in an uproar of emotions. Then she might not get any response at all. "Yes?"

"Is there any chance you would considering going on a date with me?" Glancing up at her, he smiled hopefully.

"Yes!" Clearing her throat, she played with her necklace a little. "Um, I mean, let me check my birth control... I mean date control... Yes, for the love god, yes, I will go out, just name the time and place!" Face almost as red as the book in her hand, she stood up. "Um, just tell me when and I will,
you know, meet you there. I have to go now before I stick a prick in my mouth." Not even realizing her choice of words, she gathered her stack of books and nearly ran from the library.

If she never made another mistake like that in her life, it would be too soon. Rushing down the hall, she ran a hand over her forehead to check for some demon parasite or something to explain the hormonal surge that drove her to step all over her tongue around Rupert. Finding nothing, she felt let down.

A few moments after she had left, Giles was still staring at the place she had been. "Well. That's good. I think." He was still staring when a throat cleared behind him. Jumping, he placed a hand to his chest and glared at Willow. "Yes?"

"I think I found something." Bringing in the laptop from his office, she set it down on the counter next to him. "On a hunch, I did some checking in the news groups for spice addiction, disappearances, and sand. Surprisingly, they contained some references to a series of books, but one in particular. The first in the series had the name 'Dune', which not so coincidentally, is also the name of the series. There are six books in total."

"Good work! What did they say?" A distraction was good for him mentally, or so he thought until he met her expression. "All right, tell me the rest."

"Okay, but you aren't going to like it." Pressing the command keys, Willow summoned up the information on the books. "I referenced them with the card catalog in both this library, the city library, and the county. None of them have it. We held a copy of the first book until the hellmouth incident last May. It was one of the casualties of the thing's appetite."

"Bloody hell." Sighing with disgust, Giles turned to his desk phone. Picking it up, he dialed a now familiar number. It was answered after the fifth ring. "Yes, Wynona please. Yes, I'll hold." Covering the mouth piece, he faced Willow again. "Is there anything else I need to order while I am on here?"

"Yes, that Du Lac book the vamps were after last night burned up. Buffy accidentally knocked a candle over on it before we could retrieve it from the vampires and poof, it was history. That is one phone call I never want to have again." She ignored his look in favor of summoning the list up on her computer. "I've taken the liberty of compiling a list of books we need and back up copies we might need, you know, just in case."

"Oh dear. There goes the budget for repairs this year. Tell Buffy to keep all fights out of the library from now on, we can't afford to replace any more broken furniture. Yes, Wynona, this is your," Grimacing at Willow, he rolled his eyes, "sweet hunk of British man love. Yes, yes, I want you too."

Willow could only stare in horror as she watched her mentor sweet talk the woman on the other end in to getting a discount on the books.

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There was a point to it all. There had to be. Things like this just didn't happen. It was evil, it was unjustifiable, it was a hideous hand made dress and her aunt wanted her to wear it. Forget that!

Dropping the pasteled monstrosity, Buffy kicked the box it came in far from her. There was no earthly explanation for why her aunt thought she would look good in that sack. Debating whether breaking city ordinances about burning was worth ridding herself of the dress was worth it, she ignored Angel's throat clearing.

"I said, Ahem! Buffy, I'm getting tired of just laying down here. Throw a blanket over the window
and let me out." When he still got no response, Angel grabbed the little stuffed pig. "Do it now or the pig gets it."

"Ew, gross! If you are that desperate to jack off, Angel, use the box of tissues by the head board. Now leave me be, I am on a dangerous mission." Picking up the box, Buffy headed down the hall for the stairs. She quickly glanced about for her aunt or mother. Finding neither, she ran down the stairs and to the front door.

Joyce led her sister from kitchen in to the dinning room, frowning as she felt the breeze of the front door shutting. "Buffy?" When she got no response, she heaved a sigh and half smiled at her sister. "Well it seems we are going to be eating lunch by ourselves. It's a real shame, too. There is someone I want you to meet. Buffy was supposed to get to know him last night but some guys from Las Vegas needed directions and we got side tracked talking with them while waiting for a table at the local version of Chez Rouge.

"It was the strangest thing. About halfway through our conversation, Buffy suddenly got up and went to the bathroom. One of them had to use the restroom shortly after that. Buffy came back, but the guy never did. She announced she had to go again, and again another of them went too. This happened with all six of those men. They never did come back, and by the time Buffy returned after her sixth and final bathroom break, our table was gone so we just had pizza and came home." Shrugging at her wide eyed sister, Joyce shook her head. "It's not what you are thinking, she came back less than two minutes after each time. I guess those men just really had to go to the bathroom. May be they had some bad fastfood on the way over from Vegas."
Red Sand

"The Water of Death," he said "It'd be a chain reaction. Spreading death among the little makers, killing a vector, of the life cycle that includes the spice and the makers. Arrakis will become a true desolation - without spice or maker."
- Muad-dib, The Great Death of Arrakis.

The door to Willy's bar flew open with a bang. Standing in the doorway, Xander glanced from one demon to the next until he found Willy at the counter. Moving towards his goal, he raised the dagger from his belt and stepped up to the bar.

Willy came over quickly, the damage from the night before still evident on his bar top. Reaching under the counter, he pulled out a vile. "This will fix you up kid. If you take a sip, it will remove the personality. Drink the whole thing and you're stuck with it forever. However, I have to tell you, the bitch, I mean witch who sold it to me gave me clear instructions. The memories will continue to surface until eventually you remember everything, once that happens, they will begin to fade. In a few years, you will be back to the old you."

"What's in it?" Picking up the vile, Xander examined it against the light. The red substance inside was sickeningly familiar looking.

"Inspelled Mandrake Root extract. The stuff is kinda toxic, but it makes a great fake blood for squeamish Wiccans." Snickering, he held out his palm for remuneration. The fat wad of cash around the dagger made him pale.

"Neither, either." Pocketing the vile, Xander turned for the door.

"Hey, you hear about the death of the kid behind the Magic Box? Real nasty piece of work." Willy's smirk grew in size when Xander stopped walking. "I hear he was a friend of the slayer's up from L.A. Was thinkin about trading her for immortality."

"I heard him scream as Spike tore him to pieces with his teeth like a dog." Moving again, Xander reached for the door handle. "It was funny."

Willy swallowed as he slid a hand around his throat in empathy. The slamming of his door closed caused him to jump.

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Sunday dawned with the stench of death in the alley behind the Magic Box. Police men inspected while a Crime Scene Photographer took pictures. Twenty feet away reporters tried to get a look at the body that had been discovered in the trash not an hour ago. So far all the savage craziness of the crime had been kept under raps, but that might change any moment.

Above all this on the roof of the Magic Box stood three figures. Buffy looked up from the carnage done to her former crush to her current boy friend and Watcher. Angel was wrapped in a hooded coat to protect him from the Sun. Giles held a cloth to his nose to ward off the stench.

"Do we know who did this?" Her knuckles popped as she clenched her fist in her palm. "I'm looking for a little killing action myself."
"There is a definite pattern to this killing." Giles glanced to Angel, but the vampire ignored him. Releasing his breath, Giles studied the crime scene again. "From the shape of the body, the damage to the crime scene, and the placement of the remains, I would say it was definitely a vampire."

"It was Spike." Xander didn't react as the other three faced him. Standing above the crime scene on the near by building, he kept his hood up to hide himself from the Sun as well. "I saw him catch the idiot. He actually tried to kill Spike with a gun. Needless to say the fight was over pretty quickly, his death lasted longer."

"You saw Spike kill him and did nothing to stop him?" Buffy stood there incredulous. It couldn't be, her friend would never have done that.

Glancing up at them, his eyes glowing iridescent blue, Xander's stone set face revealed no emotion. "I was studying." Looking back down at the crime scene, Xander shrugged. "He forfeited his life, it was his choice."

Aching with sadness, Buffy swallowed. "What's happened to you, Xander?"

"I don't know. I'm still trying to figure that one out, Buff." Holding his cloak tighter to his body, he shivered in the cool breeze. Xander took a deep breath before continuing. Exhaustion made it harder on him, but he couldn't rest yet. "There is something coming, Buffy. Don't fight it, you won't win. None of you will. This is my battle, I've got to do it on my own."

"We're your friends, let us help!" Buffy started for the edge of the roof with the intention of jumping across it to the next, but Angel held her back. Diverting her attention to her boyfriend, she pleaded with him. "He's my friend."

"He's gone."

Buffy looked back to where Xander had stood only to find the roof completely empty. "Why did you stop me?"

"He was already gone."

Willow glanced to the monitor of the computer she had scanning the town newspaper, coroner's office, municipalities, and Mayor's office for unusual activity. The information she had been gleaning from the news groups suggested that something much greater was going to be happening. Life was going to get a lot more interesting for them if even half of what she learned was true.

Spice addiction was apparently lethal.

Apparently there was detailed in the book a holy war led by these Fedaykin to cleanse the universe of the corrupt. Holy wars, while amusing in the abstract, were very, very bad. Especially of the cleansing kind.

There weren't much details of the novel she could find beyond that. But there were mentions of Sand Worms that might prove interesting in a biological study kind of way later on. Deciding to focus more on the Spice, she had found that there was a great deal of speculation on its true properties. All seemed to agree it was a biological agent, but not what.

There was one posting on a special news group she had to wait for a moderator to approve her posting before it would show up. The person had speculated on how much the Spice effects were real and how much of it was actual human ability. The fact that they had ignored the post made it
curious to her.

What were the abilities gained from Spice Addiction?

Her thoughts were thrown off track by something that popped up in the sewer/water database. Something had damaged one of the city wells. Whatever it was, was big and caused the earth to tremor. On a hunch, she pulled up the seismologist's database she monitored for signs of an impending hellmouth activity.

Willow's fingers froze on the keyboard. Whatever that had been attacking the well was still there. The tracking data showed it's obvious path leading from the desert to the pumping station. There was no reversal or escape path, only increased activity around the pumping station at regular intervals suggesting it was trapped there. With shaking fingers, she reached over and dialed up Buffy's pager number. When the options came up, she typed in the code number for really big demon, seven-seven-three-four.

Hanging up, she shook a little in fear. This was a really big demon. Willow forced herself not to get worked up over something that could set seismometers off. After all, a decent sized SUV could set one off. It was just that she was a little jump after the whole Master thing, with The Earth Quake awakening the hellmouth.

Pushing it from her mind, she scanned for any signs of an impending apocalypse, the usual blood from water, plague of locusts, festering boils. So far, nothing came up on any of her searches to indicate it was more than just a random demon. That made her feel a little better.

Then again, nothing random ever happened on the hellmouth. Large demon from the desert; the seismic activity was constant showing that whatever it was always ran or it slid. Either they were dealing with a giant centipede or a really large snake. A sand snake. Willow froze. "A sand worm?"

Pulling up her web browser, she typed in 'Sand Worm Size'. Much to her horror, there were posts on how big they got and just how much destruction they could do. "Oh... no, not good, not good!"

Grabbing the phone again, she dialed in Buffy's pager number. Instead, this time she typed in the emergency number seven-one-four-five-dash-four-zero. Hanging up the phone, she prayed Buffy got there soon.

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Slamming through the library doors, Buffy slid to a stop, her chest heaving from the heavy breathing. Glancing about the library, she finally spotted Willow in the book return. Moving towards her friend, she finally caught her breath. "What's up, Willow? I got the 'Hell' and 'Oh Shit' messages, is there an impending Apocalypse?"

"You don't have to sound so excited about it, Buffy." Pulling up the data, Willow thought about boring her friend with the entire complexity of her search, then discarded it. Other important things were happening. "There's a Sand Worm destroying the intakes on Well Five."

"Sand Worm, Willow? You got me to leave Giles and my boy friend, who could be turning to ash in the sun, for fish food?" Buffy was about to go off when Willow turned the screen around to face her. Upon seeing what a Sand Worm looked like, she flinched. "Oh god, you could have at least warned me. That thing is hideous. What are the teeth for?"

"Eating whatever it comes across. The size in this picture is just ridiculous. The worms are hundreds of meters long." Seeing Buffy about to glaze over, Willow sighed. It took quick thinking to convert it to basic for her friend. "A baby is from the end zone on a football field to the thirty yard line. What is
causing this damage is apparently a teenager or the whole football field in length."

"That's a big damn worm! How am I supposed to kill it? They don't exactly make hooks that big." Glancing back to the weapons locker in the book cage, Buffy suddenly felt inadequate. "I feel like I did when they asked me what I wanted to do with my life in eighth grade. If they told me then I would be a slayer, I would have asked for other options."

"It's okay, Buffy, the worm is killing itself. It got stuck in the retaining pond, the worm can't deal with water, it is highly toxic to it. The worm is gonna drown from all the water and that is the problem."

"What the Maker, that's what they call a worm, spits up as it dies is called 'The Water of Life'. It is essentially the essence of the worm. This essence is highly poisonous to anyone who even tastes a drop of it. Well Five is the main water producer for SunnyDale, Buffy. That worm is going to flood the entire town with poison, you have to stop it!"

"Oh that's just great." Buffy felt a sudden need to be else where. Mentally she debated, save the town from giant poisonous worm or go buy new shoes. It was a tough choice, but her sense of duty won out. "All right, tell me where and what am I supposed to do?"

"Shut down the station. The worm is going to die if it isn't already. We need to turn on the over flow valves and send the water out on to the ground to dissipate. Apparently if it sinks back in to the ground naturally it is neutralized by the soil." Turning her computer around to face her again, Willow typed on the key board and drew up the maps of SunnyDale. "Okay, I know how to get there. We're gonna need my mom's car, which I have conveniently parked in the lot."

Placing a hand to her chest, Buffy feigned surprise. "Willow, you car thief you, I'm shocked.

"It's not something I am proud of, but you gotta earn a living some how. How else do you think I would be able to afford these neat little accessories?" She pulled on her hat and picked up her lap top. After unplugging and closing it, she placed it in her bag. "Let's roll!"

"Now, here is a side of you I don't get to see too often, Action Willow. Do you come with a neat Kung Fu grip too?"

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Xander sat staring out over the sand of the desert. The world here made more sense than he felt it ever had the right to. Some things should just not be explained. The world was shinier, all glittery when mystery filled. He was now of the feeling too much knowledge was a bad thing.

Then again, not knowing made it that much worse. Holding the vile of Inspelled Mandrake Root, he smiled down upon it. So simple. Just forget everything he had become. One sip and he was just normal, funny Xander, friend of Buffy and Willow, thorn in the backside of 'He who broods', annoying one to Giles. So easy, yet he couldn't even bring himself to open it.

Normal funny Xander wasn't special.

All his life he had wanted special powers. Something to make him greater than superman. He wanted to be a super hero. Then he got a wake up call, learned what exactly the good guys did to save the world. The price they paid to be who they were. He now understood from their point of view.

But the question was, would he give it up to be normal again? Should he give it up? All the confusion, the thoughts that weren't his, the memories of things that never happened, were they
worth keeping? It shouldn't matter, he should just want to be his normal Xandery self. But what was so good about normal Xander?

Normal Xander got hurt. Normal Xander got the crap beat out of him by the bad guys every single time. Normal Xander couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with a wide blast from a shot gun. Normal Xander was the comic relief in the movie that was Buffy: The Evil Guy Killer. Normal Xander was alone because he was a so low on the social ladder that even the dog wouldn't piss on him.

But normal Xander also had friends. He had people who cared about him.

That was the problem. Normal Xander or Halloween Scary Dude Xander?

Forcing himself to make the decision, he popped the cap off the vile. Holding it up, he closed his eyes and put it to his lips. A sudden shooting pain up his spine made him drop it before even a drop could reach his lips. Pressure built in his head and he cried out.

On autopilot, he turned towards the source of the pain, SunnyDale. Something was happening. Xander climbed to his feet and staggered back down the dirt road to his car. He had to get to town. Not knowing why, he had a feeling it was important.

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Willow pulled up outside the Water Treatment Facility. It didn't look like much, just a large building with a few pools around it and a large metal building with pipes that lead towards the city water tower. Smiling as the dust started to settle around them, she glanced over to Buffy. Her smile grew.

Buffy stared ahead, her fingers having left furrows in the dash board from gripping it so hard. When she realized they had stopped, she blinked wide eyed at Willow. "You are never driving me again."

"Oh come on, Buffy, that was fun."

Feeling irate, Buffy leaned over to glare at her friend. "Driving safely does not mean out running not one but six cop cars."

Willow only found her threatening posture that much more amusing. Giggling, Willow grabbed her laptop bag and slid out of the car. Pulling up the blue prints from memory, she was about to tell Buffy when the ground shook. "Well, I guess you can pretty much guess where we have to go."

"The big tower with the pipes?" Buffy was already moving when she spoke. Running for the building, she had to stagger in order to remaining standing as the ground shook. She reached the stairs and took them two at a time. Upon reaching the top, she glanced about the building and froze. "Oh crap!"

"What?" Halfway up the stairs, Willow looked down. "I don't see it? What's wrong?"

"Really big worm!" She pointed towards the large pipes in the ground leading in to the water tower. Beneath it, the large end of a worm rose up from the ground. "Hold on tight, Willow." No sooner than the words were out of her mouth, than the worm's tail slapped back to the earth and shook the plant.

Willow grabbed the arm rail as she slipped on the stairs. A loud thundering shook the building while the worm tried to free itself. When the earth stopped moving, she ran up the last of the stairs to Buffy. "You have to go along this scaffolding around this tower to the other side. Over there is a valve release with a lock on it. You have to break the lock and turn it clock wise. That will turn off the city's water supply. I will redirect the city mains from it to the secondaries and empty the water from
Well Five in to the desert."

"Got it!" Buffy grinned at her friend and flashed her a thumbs up. "Good luck, Willow!"

Smiling at her friend, Willow flashed her a thumbs up too and laughed. "You too, Buffy. I'll see you back at the car when I am through."

"Will do!" Taking off around the large water tower, Buffy headed for the water supply controls.

Willow watched her for a moment before turning in the opposite direction and running for the control room. Her path took her down the water tower control steps towards the large building along the feeder pipes. What she hadn't told Buffy was that she had to pass over the inflow pipes where the worm was trapped. She was halfway across the scaffolding when the worm raised its tail again.

Seeing it coming at her, Willow ran for the other side as fast as she could. She knew she wouldn't make it when it suddenly took a downward arch. Willow desperately grabbed on to the arm rail and prayed she was strong enough to ride out the quake.

Upon reaching the giant wheel with a lock on it, Buffy smirked. "This is gonna be easier than I thought." Grabbing the lock, she jerked. It refused to budge. Glaring, she put more strength in to it and the metal only hissed. Finally, with a great twist, she rended the lock from the wheel. She dropped it to the ground and started twisting the wheel. As she gave it a final twist, she felt the Earth move.

The giant worm's tail came down upon the ground causing it to crack. Large chunks of the scaffolding behind Willow shrieked as the ground shook violently. The pipes below her broke from their moorings and water started to gush out upon the trapped worm. With dawning horror, she could only watch as several parts of the scaffolding fell.

It was a race against the falling for her survival. Willow stood on shaking feet and ran for the building on the far side. In almost slow motion the scaffolding fell out from under her. In a desperate move, she jumped for the building. Two feet short of it, Willow flinched as the air about her increased momentum.

Instead of impacting and breaking upon the pipes and ground below like she thought she would, Willow landed in a pair of strong arms. Opening her eyes in shock, she stared in to the blue ones of her best friend. "Xander?"

Xander put her down on the cement ground. "We need to free the Maker, Willow."

"We can't. It's stuck down there and going to die. If we don't hurry, the water of life will kill everyone in SunnyDale." This did something in Xander that she couldn't recognize. Seeing him resolve himself, it was like a totally different person. "Xander?"

"What do you need me to do?" Stepping back from her touch, Xander held his hand on the Crysknife.

"Uh, I need to get up to the control room." She pointed to the gangway ten feet above them. When he picked her up in a two handed carry, she blinked. When he jumped and suddenly they were landing on the gangway, she nearly had a heart attack. "Oh! Oh! We are so going to have a talk, Mister!"

"Later, Wills. Right now we got a town to save!" Putting her down again, Xander stepped back and gestured to the control room.
Side stepping him, she headed for the room. She tried the door. Finding it locked, she shook her head. "I need to get inside."

"No door too locked!" Jumping up, Xander spun around to kick the door off its hinges. As he landed, the door crashed in upon the control room. "Not exactly open-says-me, but it does the trick."

"Real long talk." Eyeing him, Willow ran in to the room and set up her lap top on the desk inside. Bringing it online, she waited until the blue prints came up. "Come on, damn it!"

"Willow," Xander screeched, "I'm shocked at you!"

"Oh, shush! I curse you know. I can curse. I curse a lot." Willow placed a lock of hair behind her ear with irritation. Her hat had fallen off some time between the car and now, she noted. When the blue prints finally came on, she compared them with the controls.

The ground shook hard again, throwing Willow in to Xander's arms. Quickly pushing her back to her feet, he ignored the look of longing she sent him. "Come on, Wills, we got to get this going."

Willow nodded. Matching up the controls with the blue prints, she began pressing the commands to shut down Well Five. Next came redirecting the flow, which required a control key. She turned to Xander and gestured at the key slot.

Xander pulled out a metal dagger and jammed it in to the slot. Twisting it clock wise, he improvised a control key. "What next?"

"Turn it to the green, press the yellow button, then turn it to the red. Press the orange button, then turn it back to the green. That should redirect the flow from the water tower to the over flow valve. Any toxic water left in the tower will be drained harmlessly in the desert." As Xander did that, Willow pressed the controls to activate the secondary pumps and increase the production of those already in service. "There, that should take care of the water supply until they clean the Sand Worm out of Well Five."

The ground shook again, this time with less intensity.

Xander turned the key slot back to the starting position and removed his dagger. "Done."

"Good, that means our work here is complete." Willow closed her lap top. Placing it back in the bag, she turned to smile at Xander. Only, he wasn't there any more. She frowned. "Xander?" No reply came.

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Underneath the intakes on Well Five, Xander walked slowly through the underground maintenance shaft. He had seen the blue prints on Willow's computer and memorized them with the blink of his eyes. He didn't even know he could do it, but it happened just like that. Now, he was moving along the service shaft towards the damaged area he knew housed the dying Maker.

He could feel its pain, knew that it suffered greatly. His pace slowed as he came to the steel door that locked off the retaining pond at the bottom of the water tower. All water the tower pulled up from the wells came to the ponds before being sent out in to the town. This was pond five, where the Maker was stuck and would drown in before the water was drained enough for it to survive.

The pain in his spine increased. Reaching the door, he turned the bolts and pulled it open. A great sloshing sound filled the cement chamber. The Maker was close now. An emotion he hadn't been able to identify before filled him in thought over the maker dying.
The ground shook one last time, faintly. A deep groan filled the chamber that resonated until it slowly faded away. At the loss of sound, the pressure in his head disappeared and Xander felt tears come to his eyes.

It was wrong.

Tears for the dead was a waste of water, a custom he had learned his first days in the desert. When he cried for Jaimis, it had been for himself as well. Now, it was just plain grief, loss of the Maker.

Xander knew it was supposed to be this way. A Maker could not survive on a green world. The Maker required pure desert sand, free from all traces of water. Earth was too green, too blue. However, the knowledge of facts still held nothing to facing the loss of this creature.

This time a different rumbling began in the tank. The water levels in the tank started to subside.

A part of him knew something had to be saved, the Maker's water was precious. Xander turned behind him. There were large rods with a cup on the end of them. Grabbing one, he lifted it over the edge of the railing and in to the pond. He pulled out a cup of the water and quickly hauled it up.

Carefully, he removed the dipping cup and carried it back to the shelf he found it on. Beside it were sample jars for testing the water. He filled two of the jars with the sample cup and dumped the rest back in the Maker's grave. After sealing both jars carefully, he wiped his hands on his cloak and put them in the pockets on his belt.

One last look at the Maker's now visible maul and Xander turned away.

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Willow reached her car and frowned. Buffy wasn't there yet. She had the easier job and should have gotten there quicker. Looking about her, Willow tried to see if Buffy was coming. No sign of the familiar blonde hair could be seen.

Walking back to the tower, she continued to see if she could find Buffy. Because the stairs to the scaffolding had crashed to the ground, she was forced to walk around the pipes. Up close, she could smell the strong scent of Cinnamon coming from the dead beast. It was funny, all the time she had been here and she hadn't even noticed until now.

With a quirked smile, Willow made an extra long trek around the dead worm. She was sure she knew a spell that could remove the dead worm before the authorities got wind of it. That had her snickering.

Finally, she came around the worm and over the pipes until she could see where the stairs reached the tower. Still no sign of Buffy. She started to grow worried. What if she was trapped on the other side? A trapped Buffy was a mean Buffy. Many a dead vampire could attest to that.

Quickly walking, she started around the tower, keeping an eye out for Buffy on any of the piping. Halfway around the tower she stopped. The computer bag she held dropped from her shoulder. "Buffy!"

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Staring in to the sun of Earth was not the smartest of things he could do, but it felt right some how. The bright light should have hurt his eyes, made him turn away blinking in tears. There was nothing beyond the usual sting for a moment and then the brilliance of the large sphere. High in the heavens, it hung, spreading the radiation that both gives and takes life.
It was a thing of ultimate beauty to him. No matter how many lives were born or perished under its light, nothing done by man effected it. Eternal in comparison, man could barely comprehend the existence. To many, all they saw, when they could look, was a ball of light. Almost none understood the intricate balance it maintained by existence.

Xander felt the world around him fade away. Slowly the sounds of birds, sirens, and even the wind filtering through his hood were drowned out. The brightness of the sun filled all his senses. Coolness of the void spread through out his limbs until he felt solid in place.

Just as slowly, a world settled around him, the burning heat of an ancient sun. Dry winds scattering particles of sand picked up about him, but left him untouched. The body housing his conscious ached from the prolonged position of sitting there. In the distance he could hear children playing, laughing over their games. One of those could be his son one day.

"What bothers you, Usul?"

A figure crossed the light, blocking his view of the sun for a moment. Blinking, Xander tried to focus on the person only to be blinded by spots in his vision.

"You have been told not to stare in to the sun, it will blind you one day."

"My vision is more clear in the face of such endlessness." Raising a hand to block out the sun so he could focus on the person, Xander tried to remember who exactly this person was. When cool fingers pressed against his neck, forcing his hood back, Xander recognized the touch. "You should not be out here in your condition, Chani."

"I should be nothing. I go where I please, do not forget that despite the burden of your son, I am still a Fremen." After kissing his forehead, she pulled the hood back in to place. "I grow restless with all this laying about. Laziness is not natural to me, I swear to never get used to it."

"And you shall not. But our son is not a Fremen, Chani, he is a burden that requires more than strength and courage to survive." Smiling, Xander played his fingers across her abdomen. "He is a Dukel heir!"

"As if that makes him better than his mother's people, your people, Usul." Frowning, Chani tried not to make it a bigger issue, but the man she held now would never truly be one of her people. Usul was the Madhi, he was the voice that would lead them, free them. She would never show it, but the man she held now would never truly be one of her people. Usul was the Madhi, he was the voice that would lead them, free them. She would never show it, but at times like this, when he was all alone in his vision, she feared him. She feared what this meant for their unborn child. "We are your people, Paul Mua'dib."

"And I am yours." Xander knew this for a lie the moment it came from his mouth. He would never be one with them, never truly come to accept their ways as his own. Paul was an instrument of change, a catalyst that left destruction in its wake. From here they would go out, they would scatter among the stars like fertilizer in a garden and rid the universe of stagnation. He was not a Fremen, he was their god.

Opening his eyes, Xander was once again on his rock over looking the desert. Shadows had fallen across the desert while he sat there dreaming. He swallowed to wet his mouth, the taste of Spice filling his throat.

He had over dosed on Spice.

Xander knew this was very dangerous. Over dosing on Spice increased his tolerance threshold faster and he would need more from now on. The side effect of zoning out and losing oneself in the Spice
Vision was also hazardous. One was potentially defenseless under the influence of the drug. That was something he would have to get used to until he could overcome it.

Then again, he never knew if he would ever come it. There was no previous experience for him to draw back upon that said one time he would not come back from the Spice Trance. Time would only tell.

Closing his eyes as a wind picked up over the horizon, Xander started to chant to himself the words of his lessons. "My mind and my body become one. I have become one, I have become many. I feel them, I know... Buffy." The whispered word caused Xander's eyes to open.

He rose to his feet. The world felt oddly silent all of a sudden. Not even the winds buffeting his hood held sound. In spite of the intense heat, he began to freeze. Hopping off the rock, Xander moved back to the trail and headed for the road where he left his car.

It was almost over.

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Keeping his head down, Xander moved through the Hospital. Down the halls towards the emergency room, he felt so near to his goal. People cleared out of his way without him even having to make mention of it. Outside the Emergency Room, he stopped.

It took a minute for the gathered people to realize he was there.

Willow shot to her feet, launching herself for Xander's arms. When he held her at arm's length, she stared at him in confusion. "Xander?"

"I came here to say goodbye." Gently handing her off to Giles, he firmly kept her away from himself. Xander met the older man's gaze. It was just as he had feared. He forced himself to look away and head inside the room.

Inside the room only two beds were occupied. The one at the far end of the emergency room was an elderly woman being assisted. The bed closest to him had a police man standing guard over it. In it, Buffy lay broken and on life support. Several parts of her body were wrapped in bandages, including her head.

Coming towards the cop, Xander stared him down. "You may go."

Hand on his weapon, the officer shook his head. "I can't do that."

"Yes, you can." Inflecting his voice, Xander went as high as his voice would go without cracking. "There is no need to guard her. She is just a girl, she couldn't harm anyone."

"Right, just a girl." Sneering down at Buffy, the officer adjusted his belt and started away. He bumped shoulders with Xander as he walked passed him.

Xander let the insult go. It was better to let the man think he was superior else he might wise up and the voice would lose power over him. Then again, he worked for SunnyDale PD, there was no way the voice would ever lose effect. Moving closer to the bed, Xander held his cloak tighter about him.

Accepting loss as a part of the cycle was the Fremen way. His father had taught him to not let grief overcome him, to remember the strength of the Strong and honor them for it. His mother had instructed him in the Bene Gesserit way, to not see death as an ending so long as a life has been properly used. Duncan ripped from him the very essence of his humanity when he died.
All these methods for grieving were meaningless as he stared down upon his broken friend. Despite the strength he knew she possessed, the form in the bed was far from capable of withstanding even a harsh thought now. Reaching out, Xander slipped his hand in hers and gently squeezed the undamaged fingers. The only thing he could see uncovered.

He could hear the faint beeping of her heart monitor. Such an ugly, harsh sound to know that a person's existence could be so limited. He longed to reach out and shut the machine up. He wanted to rip the tubes that desecrated her body. He wanted to strip from her every last piece of unflattering bandage. Xander wanted so much, he wanted to be able to heal her, to make all her troubles go away.

But he could do nothing.

Watching the rise and fall of her chest, Xander's world started to blur. He tried blinking it right again, but the strange distortion continued. It wasn't until the burning sensation spread from his eyes and down his cheek that he realized it had been tears. Wiping at them, he stared in fascination.

It had been so long since he had cried, Xander could hardly remember what the sensation felt like. Tears for the dead was a waste of precious fluid. In a desert world, water was more precious than gold. The harsh lessons learned stuck with a person no matter where they went afterwards. It really was a waste of fluids, but Xander couldn't bring himself to stop crying.

"Oh, Buffy..." Throat constricting, he looked away towards the wall. "We were going to make it. You were going to be the oldest living slayer ever and I was going to be right there by your side being the oldest living slayer's best guy friend, because... that's what I do. I'm your Xander, your goofy yet loveable friend. And Willow would be there, just us three. Of course we can't forget Giles, he would probably be telling us to keep our music down even when he is a hundred and couldn't hear a thing."

Sighing, he forced himself to overcome the emotions and to say what he came here to say. "You are my best friend, Buffy. At times I envied you, at times I wanted you, there were even times I felt so completely overwhelmed by you, but most of the time I just was so glad, so proud you chose me to be your Xander friend. I can't really explain how I feel about you, not sure myself, being of the non too articulate variety. It all boils down to just how much we care about each other and what lengths we are willing to go just to see each other happy."

Xander stopped. He looked directly upon her face. "Buffy, I want you to be happy. The time has come for you to be happy and I think you should take it." Squeezing her hand, he tried to express how much this meant to him. "You did what you had to do, you've defeated the bad guy, got the golden key, and rescued the princess. It's game over time and you can go off to that big slayer playground in the sky. You can rest now."

"What do you think you are doing?" Angel grabbed the boy's hand from Buffy's and jerked Xander around to face him. "Just what the hell is going on here?"

"Stay out of this, Dead Boy, she's been through enough!" Pulling his arm free, Xander ignored the glare Angel was giving him. "There is nothing left for her to do here, she can go..."

Angel grabbed Xander by the throat. "Shut your mouth! Just shut it! She's not going anywhere, you hear me?"

Xander's hand went around Angel's wrist and tightened quickly until he heard a snap. Freeing himself, he shoved Angel away. "It is her time. Let her go!"
"Get away from her!" Angel tried to get at Buffy, but Xander bodily blocked him. Each move of his arms or body was met by Xander no matter how fast. Desperate, he tried to aim directly for the boy only to find air in his path. "Let me to her! She needs me! Buffy is going to get better and I am going to be there when she does!"

"Don't be an idiot!" Hitting Angel in the chest, he sent the vampire flying back against the wall. Standing over the huffing vampire, Xander adjusted his cloak. "She is not all right, things will not get better. The only reason she is still alive is because she feels an obligation to remain with us!"

Glancing up at Xander, Angel frowned. "How do you know?"

"Because I can feel it. I know it." Xander twisted to stare at Buffy again. "I know her. She's in so much pain, I can feel it inside me. Every break, every fracture, every bruise, so much so that it is taking all she's got just to keep her heart pumping. It's too much." Swallowing, Xander shook his head. "It's too much. She's done enough, been through enough. Just let her rest. If you love her, you'll tell her she can go."

"I can't do that."

"Then she'll linger on in pain until you do." Xander brushed the back of his hand over Buffy's bandaged cheek. Turning to go, he spared one last look at Angel. He wanted to say something more, but thought better of it. Closing his eyes to Angel, Xander tuned out the dead man from his senses and walked away.

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He was on top of the Espresso Pump when he felt it.

Sitting on top of the most popular building in town aside from the Bronze, Xander had been watching the town since an hour before sunset. It was amazing the amount of life that went on in this down despite the evil behind it. People persisted in the strangest of states.

Then again, people of the empire felt it insane that a group of desert dwelling misfits inhabited the same sands as the Maker. To each his own, as the old saying went. There were better things in life than to examine why some people were crazy enough to live in such harsh conditions.

One of those things was staying alive long enough to see the next sun rise. It had always been a challenge for him, each day harder than the next. There were times when it felt like all he had were these moments of just existing, watching the people and envying them their selective ignorance. He couldn't do that, he couldn't just sit by and let others die when there was something to be done.

He couldn't let others suffer.

When he felt her slip away, Xander closed his eyes and prayed she found peace at last to no one in particular. In her short life, Buffy had more than earned her rest. He hoped it found her and never let go.

Pulling up his hood, Xander turned away from the town.
Monday dawned bright and early for Willow. Despite the beauty of what would be a cheerful morning, all she wanted to do was stay curled up under her covers. It took her a moment to realize that her hopeful magical abilities hadn't progressed beyond just understanding the words of a spell. That meant the death spell she had wanted to say to the clock was worthless. Glaring at the blaring alarm, she willed it to die, fruitlessly.

After five minutes, she finally back handed it against the wall, effectively silencing the damned thing forever. Thinking about death brought back the memories of yesterday and she curled in tighter upon the mattress. She didn't want to get up today.

When her mother knocked upon her door, Willow didn't respond. After a while, the knocks stopped and her mother walked away. It was better this way.

In the library, a memorial was set up by Giles. Not so surprising to him, no one even stopped by or paid notice to it. There was a sign on the door letting them know it was here, he had made sure about that much. Even a bulletin in the school news paper. He surmised that either no one paid attention to the library and the news paper or they just didn't care. Either way, it was not his problem how disgraceful these children were.

Setting down the paper, he glanced to the empty table where the three students he had come to depend upon were no longer sitting. He had called Willow's mother that morning and that was not a conversation he wished to have again. Needless to say, his friend would no longer be coming to his library. Not that it would be his library for much longer.

His four phone calls to the boy Xander's family had gone unanswered. His appearance at the door had met with similar responses. This worried him less than it should have. Giles knew he should have been fraught with worry, but the emotion just wouldn't come to him. Xander was growing up, he could deal with grief in his own way.

Smiling sadly, he shook his head in denial. "Doesn't need the grief of an older man to burden him. Must make do with what I've got."

"I'm here, Rupert." Jenny wrapped her arms up from under his, over his chest to tighten in a warm embrace across his chest. Resting her chin on his shoulder, she had to strain a little to reach the height. "You aren't alone in this, I will be here for you."

"And I am grateful for your presence, but I still feel like there should be more of an impact on the lives of these young people. Someone should not just die and there be no impact." In a sudden fit, he took off his glasses and slammed them down on the counter top. Rubbing at his forehead, Rupert groaned in frustration. "I heard from the Council this morning, I am being recalled. Since there is nothing here to stop me, I believe I will go back."

Jenny pulled back her hands. Staring at him in shock, she felt an urge to hit him. "Nothing stopping you."

"That's right, the only ties I have to the community are you and these kids. Now that my duties are fulfilled, I have little reason to protest their orders." Picking up his glasses, he put them back on. He was now more composed and ready to deal with life. He turned slightly to stare at her. "You know,
there is nothing holding you here either. I am sure the Council can get you a position at any school of your choice in London."

Crossing her arms, Jenny glared at him. "Wait a minute, just a second ago you said nothing here was stopping you from going. Now, you're suggesting I move across the world. What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I am suggesting that your special knowledge of the super natural combined with your computer skills and teaching credentials, that you would prove an asset to the council." Putting on his best smile to try and placate her despite the circumstances, he felt the need to be reassuring.

"Rupert, I'm shocked." Her movements became jerky while she reeled from his words. Cocking her head, she squinted. "Are you asking me to come with you?"

"Essentially."

"Gee, you aren't one much for making light decisions, are you. Never mind, don't answer that. Give me a little time, I'll have to think it over and get back to you."

Sitting on the bed, Joyce wrapped the blanket around her waist. Glancing about the room, she tried to reconcile it. It just didn't seem to fit with reality. On the dresser was a half eaten box of cookies still open. Her makeup bag was scattered next to that. Buffy had been running late when she got a call from her boyfriend. At the time, Joyce had thought it a relief that she wouldn't have to deal with her daughter around her cousins again. She had come home Saturday finding them in her room and the shit had hit the fan. Since then the bedroom had been persona non grata for anything breathing and not Buffy.

Clenching the comforter tighter, she continued to search for something. Joyce frowned. There was just something wrong about the room. Unable to find it, she put the blanket aside and reached over for Buffy's picture on the bedside table. Joyce smiled at the faces of her and her friends Xander and Willow. She didn't know when the picture was taken, just that it meant a lot to Buffy.

A memory came back to her of when Buffy had seen her last holding it and asked what she was doing snooping. Putting the picture back down carefully so as not to make it look like anyone had touched it, Joyce traced her fingers over Buffy's face. "So pretty."

There was no responce from the photo. Letting her hand fall back to her side, Joyce continued her inspection of the room. Light touches of her daughter were here and there amongs the scattered clothes, school books, jewelry, and girly paraphanalia. The pink fur of a stuffed pig caught her attention.

Picking up the pig, Joyce ruffled the fake fur. "Mr. Gordo. I remember when Hank first brought you home for Buffy. She loves you the most." Movement in the door drew her attention away from the pig. "Sorry, Buffy. I was just... Eileen. For a moment I thought you were Buffy." Turning away from her sister, Joyce, held up the pig. "Mr. Gordo, he's Buffy's favorite. I just came to get something for them to bury her in and I guess I got distracted. It's just so hard to believe that... No!"

Joyce slammed the pig down on the bed in anger. "Buffy is dead! Buffy is dead! Buffy..." Her clenched fist rose to her face and she closed her eyes. "My daughter is dead and I can't, I just can't." Standing up, Joyce picked up the white dress that had been hanging on Buffy's closet door for six months. "She loved this dress, so this dress it is. Let's go."
Sheila Rosenberg sat at her coffee table arranging her collage when the door bell rang. It being the middle of the day on a monday, this was unusual. The painters for the back room weren't due til two, besides, the Price is Right was still on in the other room with Harold watching it. Frowning, she stood and made for the door.

Upon the opening the door she felt like slamming it shut. She had known this was coming from the moment she learned of her daughter's friend. Sheila put on a pleasant face. "How may I help you officers?"

"Ma'am," the elder officer said with a tip of his hat. "We are here to speak with your daughter."

"Is there something wrong? I assure you she had nothing to do with yesterday." Still not opening the door, she only cocked her head at their motions to let them in.

"We know that. This isn't about her, per sey." When Sheila stepped aside, the older officer smiled again. "Thank you. While my partner talks with your daughter, I'd like to know what you can tell me about one Alexander Harris."

Sitting in the kitchen, Xander continued to stare at the clock, watching the hands move. It was a funny thing to watch as he didn't feel its passing. At that moment the clock read eight past three in the morning. Right now he should have been in bed, tossing from another night mare. Xander half smiled in hysterical amusement.

It had been one week, four days since halloween. It had been one week, two days since he last slept. There was no sign of things changing.

Sitting there, he tired to summon up a yahn or a feeling of being tired, but he just felt fine. He felt better than fine, actually. If he was honest, he hadn't felt this good in a while. That was the main problem.

"Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock." He continued to watch the clock. There should have been some change in him.

Xander wanted to sleep. He needed to sleep. Why couldn't he sleep?

Rubbing at the back of his neck, Xander glanced away from the clock. "Well, this has been fun." Standing up, he pulled up the hood of his cloak. He was about to head for the back door when his mother came in to the kitchen.

"What are you doing up?" Scratching at the back of her neck, she yahned and headed for the icebox. Reaching inside, she pulled out the milk and grabbed a glass from the counter. When she faced her son again, she raised an eyebrow. "Well?"

"Nothing, just couldn't sleep." Xander leaned back against the stove, smiling at his mother.

"It's probably that candy you've been eating, I swear that stuff was better than coffee." Chuckling, she finished her milk. "For two days I was completely wired and then suddenly I crashed." She eyed him for a minute. "You didn't put anything illegal in it, did you?"

At that he had to laugh. "No, mom, there is nothing in any way illegal in that candy."
"Okay, but just in case it should be, take it easy on the stuff." Rinsing out her glass, she put it on the sink to be washed. She was heading back for the living room when she stopped. "You wouldn't happen to have any more of it, would you?"

"Nope." Watching her go, he snorted. It was a lie, of course, but if what was happening to him was to be blamed on the spice, he would be damned before he gave her any more.

"Okay, just checking. Night, sweety."

"Night." After her foot steps had disappeared up the stairs, Xander headed for the door again and closed it softly behind him. Stepping out in to the night, his eyes adapted to the lack of light. It was nothing new to him, he had been doing it every night for the last nine days.

If the spice was to blame, then he was fucked.

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The night had turned to day in the time that Xander had spent wondering the streets looking for something to do. Two vampires were now dust and a demon that had been breaking in to an ATM was now broken in to pieces. It had been over so quickly all three times he hardly noticed the incidents at all.

According to town clock on main street he was supposed to have been at school a half hour ago. With nothing else better to do, Xander turned down the street towards the school. It would at least provide some amusement to listen to the teachers drone on.

Making his way down the ten blocks towards the school, he mused on how little Buffy's death had effected him. For someone who had meant such a great deal to him, he should have been mourning her loss. He should have been doing a lot of things that he wasn't. Hell, even Patsy Cline had lost her appeal and no one deals with pain better than ole Patsy.

Crossing the middle of the street of his second block he realized he had slowed down to almost a crawl. The blaring of a car horn hadn't even phased him. Stopping, he continued to stare ahead. There really should have been something that bothered him about this.

Movement out of the corner of his eye had him moving to him what felt like through molassis so he could see the source. It was a car coming at him. Even the car seemed to be moving slowly. The entire world was almost at a stand still.

Xander frowned. That wasn't right. Reaching out, he placed a hand on the hood of the car and shoved. The next instant the world seemed to speed up and the car crumpled against his hand. Moving his arm to the side, Xander dragged the crumpled vehicle a couple feet then released it. Never in all his life had he been able to do that. The Bene Jesserit training his mother had put him through was not designed to give superman abilities, just better reflexes and stronger muscles. Glancing down at his hand, he tried to reconcile what just occured with all he knew. It wasn't possible, not even for a slayer.

That seemed to break him out of his funk. Moving off down the street, Xander picked up speed until the world was flying around him again. As soon as the school was in sight, he dropped out of what he called Self-Warp. Moving down the side walk at a normal pace, he saw the school was letting out first period and students were heading to their next class.

He was about to cross the street when he saw the cop sitting outside the library in a metal folding chair. Pulling up his oil lense, Xander looked the man over. The cop held a picture of himself,
Willow and Buffy that could only have come from one place. That meant the man was after them, he had to warn the Buffster.... "Right." They were after him and Willow because of the Buffster.

"I suppose I shouldn't be surprised." Shaking his head, Xander placed the newly made oil lens in his belt pouch. Until he knew what exactly they were after him for, there would be no going to school. There was one way to find out quickly what they were after.

Smirking, Xander zipped across the street, the school parking lot, and down the side walk to the stop beside the cop. Before the man could stand up, Xander grabbed him by the lapels and shoved him against the wall. He inflected his voice to a high pitch and prayed it worked. "You will tell me why you are after Xander Harris."

"He's a killer! The boy was part of the group of kids that tried poisoning the city's water." Growling, the man shoved at Xander's arms and freed himself. "You punks, not a single ounce of respect among you. When we get our hands on him, we'll show him what we do to killer's here. We are American's here, not some Commie lovin..." was as far as the man got before Xander slammed him in to the wall.

"Shut up." Growling, Xander started to squeeze his throat. "Who all have you interrogated for information on this supposed plot?"

"The faggot librarian, the little bitch girl's mom, and the other girl's family. I tried telling the Sargent that your Jewish girlfriend is in on the plot, that them disgusting Jews are..." He found himself slammed face first in to the concrete, out cold.

"I knew your kind were dumb, but racism went out with the sixties, asshole!" Out of a need to vent his rage over the situation, Xander kicked the cop in the ribs. The cop flew against the building and Xander stared in shock at the now broken man. "I'm sorry... I didn't mean to... you shouldn't have... Oh god, what's going on with me?"

Xander glanced about to see if anyone had seen him. When he was reasonably sure he was alone, he took off for the pay phone in the quad. He dialed 0 and waited for the operator. "There's a guy hurt outside the high school library. I think he's a cop, but I'm not sure. All I heard were some racist remarks and then the guy go down. When I checked, he was barely breathing. Send someone and hurry!" He let the phone drop before taking off at top speed.

So much for going to school.

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Sitting in the middle of a cemetery upon a headstone, Xander tried to think over the events of the past few days. It was easy to summon the memories, but no ensuing emotions would come. Everything he tried to feel seemed to be beyond his grasp. Finding no urge to do anything else, he had sat there the entire day.

He wasn't quite sure when night had fallen. He wasn't hungry yet, but judging from the way his gut was talking to him, he would be soon. That was another thing he had noticed. His body did not require as much food. It was strange, not being hungry, it was almost like he was turning in to a statue.

On a hunch, he stood in place, unmoving, arms wide. When he was forced to take another breath, he sighed. "So much for that theory." Lowering his arms, Xander continued to stand there. He tried to sum up what the world felt like to him at that moment, with what little he could feel, the only word that came to mind was pointless.
Standing across from him in the grave yard stood a figure in green. Staring at Xander, the man continued to stand there, just watching him.

Xander noted their stances were identical. Quickly, the shadows of the graveyard dissipated in the morning light. Birds flew past and disappeared, plants and trees blew in unfelt breezes, drying up as sand took their place. In the distance, the sun rose over head, yet still neither of them moved. Xander knew he could stand there forever, waiting for the other man.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the man inclined his head. Stepping back under a tree, he disappeared and the night returned.

About to follow him, Xander tripped over something and crashed face first into the freshly turned grave. "Great, just what I needed." He pulled out the crysknife, ready to kill the new fledgeling. Rolling over, he discovered the little demon was already half out of the ground with the tip of a stake poking through the front of his shirt.

As the vampire turned to dust, Angel stood erect again. He cocked his head to the side and stared down upon Xander. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought I'd act lay out a 'welcome to your afterlife' buffet for the new vampire." Xander dusted himself off and quickly climbed to his feet. "Don't you have a tomb to haunt, maybe an opera house to disturb with elevator music?"

Ignoring the boy, Angel stepped around him and headed for the opposite side of the cemetery.

Watching him go, Xander felt the world around him shift until he fell to his knees. Grabbing the ground for support, he glanced back up to see if Angel was still there only to find the vampire he knew in two different forms. Off to his right, drenched in sunlight, Angel stood with his arms open and turning to ash. To his left, Angel was standing in shadows locked in battle with a horned demon.

They were both possible futures, the one in sunlight a coming morning, and the shadows a distant night. He knew how they would come to pass and how to influence both from happening. The key in the second case was him. Gripping the ground as a pain shot through his skull, he fought off a wave of nausea rising in him.

He was the deciding factor in Angel's life. If he let Angel go on as he was now, he would eventually work up the nerve to step out into the sunlight. Swallowing against the bile, Xander stood up. Despite the fact that he could barely stand the smug asshole, he had to do something for Angel.

Feeling something for the first time in days, Xander grinned. Picking up speed, he quickly caught up with Angel. Popping up suddenly beside the vampire, he enjoyed the thrill of having spooked the spook. "So, Deadboy, just what are you doing out here?"

Having recovered from his shock, Angel let his bad mood resurface. "What do you want, Xander?"

"Nothing, really. Just curious why you are still around and not filling up some body's dust buster." Shrugging in his cloak, Xander walked slowly around Angel as the vampire glared at him. "It seems to me that by now, someone who was so in love with someone like Buffy would have found a way to kill himself. I mean, you did love her, right?" He used the Bene Gesserit training to zip past Angel's lunge and appear on the other side of the falling vampire.

Angel came crashing down upon the ground with a grunt. Growling, he clawed the dirt as he threw himself at Xander again. His attempt only landed him face first into a tomb stone.

Sitting on the stone just above Angel, Xander shook his head in disapproval. "Tisk tisk, you should
know better than that by now, Fangface."

"What the hell do you want," Angel screamed.

"The usual, fame, fortune, sex, to feel something other than numb." Sliding off the tombstone, he landed on Angel's back. He rubbed his boots clean on Angel's coat before stepping off. "But right now, I would settle for grief. Then again, this isn't really about me." Using the toe of his boot, Xander kicked Angel over on his back. "Are you really this stupid?"

Blinking, Angel couldn't summon the strength to care what the boy did. He looked passed the boy towards the sky and watched the stars.

Xander wasn't having any of it. Throwing one leg over Angel's waist, he sat down on his hips. Staring at the careless vampire, he felt the numbness start to return. If he couldn't get Angel to respond soon, he'd stop caring if the vampire survived. He tapped Angel on the face. "Hey, how am I supposed to cause you vampire angst if you aren't paying attention?"

"Sorry to be such an inconvenience." Glaring at the boy, Angel grabbed his wrist to stop him from hitting him. "What do you want?"

"I told you. This isn't about me, this is about you." Sighing, Xander leaned forward until their noses were touching. "Look, Deadboy, I know we've had our differences in the past, but the time has come to... overcome our differences. You want me to leave you alone, I want you, period. Thing is, neither of us is gonna get what he wants."

Angel tried to shove Xander away only to find the boy couldn't be budged. After his third gut busting push that only resulted in having Xander crush him further in to the ground, he gave up and glanced away in anger. "Why are you doing this?"

"Because the thought of you turning in to a walking match stick isn't as appealing as it once was. Though, if you still want to do that, at least have the decency to wait until after Buffy's funeral." Lowering his face to Angel's ear, Xander felt his body relax against the larger man. "I've wanted to be with you like this a while now, just didn't think it would take my best friend dying to get you on your back."

"Okay, I've had enough of this. You want to reminisce and be morbid, fine, just do it somewhere else!" This time Angel got Xander to sit up, allowing himself to sit up in turn. However, his plans back fired when it positioned Xander in the perfect place to wrap his body around the vampire. Angel groaned. "Let go. Now!"

"Nope. You need a hug. I want a hug. Let's hug together." Xander squeezed until he heard bones grind and Angel gasp. "See, doesn't that feel better?"

"All right, you asked for it." Game faced, Angel bent his head down to bite Xander. Nuzzling through the dense layers of fabric, he tried to locate skin. It took him a moment and a lap full of squirming boy before he reached neck. "Last chance, Xander."

"Go ahead, try it, I guarantee you won't like it." In the next second Xander grimaced from the pain as Angel bit him then yanked his teeth out. As Angel began to spit to clean the flavor from his mouth, Xander smirked. "I tried warning you, Deadboy. While the Xandman may look magically delicious, his taste is a very bitter pill to swallow."

Angel wiped at his tongue, letting the piece of flesh hang out of his lips. The taste had numbed the inside of his mouth. Shaking his head again, he tried to restore some feeling to his mouth.
"Angel..." the insult he had been about to say slipped from his mind as the malaise won over again. Letting Angel go, Xander slowly climbed to his feet. He couldn't even summon the will to say good bye as he turned away from the vampire. Heading from the cemetary, Xander started to wander aimlessly.

Angel watched in shock as Xander drifted away from him. Trying to stand, he fell back against the ground. His body slowly started to go numb and he tried to fight against it. Soon he was flat on his back, helpless to move.

Coming from the shadows of the moselium, a tall figure in a green cloak appeared above Angel. Blue within Blue eyes, knowing full well what was happening, watched with amusement. "The taste of Shai Hulud is toxic to one such as yourself. It extends life, enhances, changes those it touches. The dead do not benefit from the Maker's grace." Bending down, he reached out a gloved hand and traced it down the side of Angel's face. "Stay away from my lord Duke, I'll not warn you again."

Standing, the figure walked after Xander.

Confusion warred with the grief and anger Angel felt. Tomorrow was Buffy's funeral, but at the moment he was more concerned with what was happening with her annoying friend. It was a long while before he was able to summon the strength to move.

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Stumbling down the street, it took a while for Xander to realize he was almost home. Two houses down was his own for all the good it did him. Sitting on his front porch was a cop and his mother. She had a tissue in her hand daubing at her eye to prevent runny mascara. The uniform was smugly staring at her, barely disguising his attempt at interrogatation.

Drawing closer, Xander strained to hear what they were saying.

"Did you know your son was involved with these criminals, Mrs. Harris?" Patting her on the knee, Officer Williams shifted closer. "I know this is difficult, but it would be best for all if you helped me bring them to justice. We can help your son, I'm sure he was a good boy."

"He is a good kid!" Shoving the man's hand from her knee, she stood up. "I have no idea what you are talking about. My son is not a criminal, I would know."

"Ma'am, no offense, but you work late and sleep through the day. By your own admission, you have no idea what exactly he has been doing." Standing up, he tried to match her height but came short by three inches. "If you would allow me to search his bedroom, I can prove it to you." When she seemed about to protest, he leaned in and whispered. "We already interrogated the Librarian, so we know what we are looking for. He and Mrs. Rosenberg were very helpful."

Her anger welling up, she crossed her arms and stood off to the side of the porch. "Just what did they have to say?"

"Lot's." Matching her stance, Williams smirked. "As a matter of fact, they are waking up Judge Mathis as we speak to get a warrant. So you see, if you would let me in now, it will save us a lot of time and trouble."

"I don't believe you." Turning to go, she was forced to stop when William's hand grabbed her arm. "Get off my porch, now."

"Your son is being charged with attempted mass murder. If that little blonde bitch hadn't died, she'd be up there with him. We have his finger prints at the crime scene, they were matched with those on
record at the school. We have a video of him entering the city water tower controls. The statement from the librarian cinched it, though. With him testifying, how long do you think it will take before the jury comes back with a guilty..." Williams gasped, clutching at his back, he began to spit up blood.

"Thank you for that bit of information, I'll be sure he knows it was you who revealed his treachery before he dies." Dragging his dagger up the spine of the officer, the green hooded figure sliced all the way to the skull before letting the body drop. Glaring at the woman, he wiped his knife off on the body of Officer Williams. "Be glad I have other business to attend else I would silence you as well, Paul be damned!" Putting his dagger away, the figure took off at top speed.

Standing against a tree, Xander replayed what the figure had said. The impact of what the man had said finally struck home. Panic gripped him and for the first time in a week he felt true fear. "G-man!"

Giles was putting a stack of books in a travel box when he heard the doors to the library swing open. Turning around, he saw the library was empty. Shaking his head, he set them in carefully. Their leather binding would need to be redone when he got home. Glancing up when the task was finished he jumped back against the table upon seeing the dark figure.

Taking in the green cloak, the hawk crest and the blue eyes, Giles adjusted his glasses. "Xander, are you deliberately trying to kill me?" The sudden drawing of a bone white knife made him loose all control of his faculties. "Oh lord!"

The figure lunged at Giles, his knife swiping out, struck the table when the Watcher jumped out of the way.

Rolling to his feet, Giles pulled out the dagger from his suit jacket. He held it under handed to match his opponent. "Xander, I don't want to hurt you."

"You will die, traitor!" The figure raced at Giles again, their knifes clashing against one another over head then under hand in a circle. He smacked Giles across the face, then backed away when Gile's kneed him in the gut.

"This has gone far enough!" Head butting the figure, Giles spun his knife the blade up.

"I agree." Standing in the doorway, Xander glared at the hooded figure. His own hood and facial scarf undone, he looked wild and unkempt. "You will stand down, Fedaykin!"

"Stay out of this, Paul!" Rising to his feet, the figure raised his dagger to attack Giles. Instead of the older man being there, his dagger clashed against Xander's. "What are you doing?"

"I could ask you the same thing." Shoving the warrior away, Xander replaced his dagger in his suit. "Get out of here before I get angry."

"He is a traitor! It is the law." Upon seeing Xander's resolve, his own blue eyes narrowed. Stepping back, he replaced his dagger faster than Giles could see. "Very well, we will discuss this later, Dukeling." A swish of his cloak and he ran through the doors to disappear.

Giles let out a gasp and a loud, wet fart. Catching his breath, he leaned over the table to glare at Xander. "Care.... to explain this?"

Xander's blue on blue eyes quickly lost focus. "I don't know what is going on." Leaning on a nearby
chair, Xander fell in to it. "I have no idea what is happening. I was... when I caught sight of the guy in the green cloak... I came in here just in time. Sorry he got to you first, I was a little distracted."

Coming over to stand beside Xander, Giles lay a hand upon his shoulder. "Are you hurt? You look pale."

"Really? Must be the lack of sunlight." Staring off in to the distance, Xander's breathing quickly evened out and he was back to his numb state. It took Giles' snapping fingers in front of his face to get his mind back on the situation. "Sorry." Xander smiled, chagrined at his behavior. "I can't seem to bring myself to care lately. It took all I had just to get here in time to stop..." He trailed off as he pulled out a piece of Spice Candy. Chewing on it, Xander sighed.

"What is going on here?" When he got no response, Giles knelt down in front of the young man. It took him a second to recall that there was a situation beside his own problems. His mind raced over what he had learned before Buffy's death about Xander's situation, which wasn't much. "Xander, look at me."

It wasn't that he hadn't heard, it just didn't make an impact on him. Standing up, Xander pushed passed Giles. He was getting hungry. There was definitely something in the vending machine, even at this time of night. They restocked it every day after school.

Upon reaching the machine, he slammed his fist through the glass to get at the candy. The shattering of the glass felt funny upon his fist, but the glove protected him from harm. Pulling out the sticks of jerky and a package of twinkies, he bit them open and spit the packages aside while consuming them.

Giles stared on in sick fascination as the vending machine was systematically cleaned out of snacks in a record time. By the time Xander slowed down enough that Giles could see the movements, the machine was surrounded by torn wrappers and half eaten candy bars.

Xander burped and stepped back from the machine. It was enough for now. That settled, he moved on. There would be another time to eat in the future, right now he needed to keep moving.

It was strange, he had never experienced something like this in all his life. The boy was acting without conscious thought, merely satisfying his basic needs before moving on. He had consumed the food from the vending machine at a phenomenal rate then walked off. All attempts at trying to get him to listen had been ignored by Xander. There had to be a cause behind it all. When Xander exited the school in no particular direction, Giles rushed to his car. There was no need to worry, the young man was basically a wandering animal, he could handle it, he had seen that much. Besides, he was going to get to the bottom of this even if it meant driving all night to get that book.
A Hand Full Of Sand

Xander couldn't remember how long he had been going or where when next he came around in his own mind. For so long he had been simply caught up in the sensation of moving that all else had ceased to exist. At first he wasn't quite sure what it had been that dragged him from his innersense. Slowly he realized he was on his back staring up at the sun with some sort of blob moving over him.

He frowned trying to clear his eyes to make out what it was. The blob resolved itself in to a person. It was then that sound returned to him and he heard sirens. His mind rebooting to the last conscious thoughts focused on the part that it was probably the police. Someone had alerted them to his presence.

Rolling to his feet, Xander shook the dirt and various plant matter from his cloak. He adjusted his cloak and shoved the person away from him. He wasn't about to let anyone restrain him so the cops could haul him away for saving their sorry lives. Glaring at the woman as she tried to grab him again, he screached at her.

Xander jumped on top of her car, crushing the hood under him before using it to launch himself on a near by roof. From there he ran down main street over the buildings towards the factory block at the end of the street. As he jumped for another roof, he shook his head in anger. The people in Sunnydale were too dumb to realize what was going on around them, but when it came to some concerned citizens doing a little something illegal to save them they were ready to turn on them.

It wasn't fair.

Buffy had died a hero and all they could do was tarnish her name as a criminal. They planned on doing the same to him if they could catch him. It was then Xander realized he had been running, but there was no clear destination for him. What was he going to do now that the whole town thought he was a criminal terrorist?

Coming to a stop, Xander held himself up on the final ledge before the warehouse district. Just what was the point of running? There was no place he could go that he would want to with the cops after him. Lowering himself to his knees, Xander glared around him at the world. "What a shitty place."

"While it is far from Caladan, it isn't exactly Ghedi Prime either." Turning so he could sit on the ledge next to Xander, the figure place a hand on top of the boy's head. His gloved fingers slipped under the hood to run through dark hair.

Xander turned in to the touch, wrapping his arms around the waist of his mentor. "Duncan."

"Yes, young Paul?" The feel of the strong arms around his body made the man hesitate in answering. His body yearned to take the young man in his arms, to place a kiss on the skin at the base of his throat, yet he resisted. This was neither the time or place to share a private moment with his charge. "What of this place?"

Xander was too far caught up in the strong, familiar scent of his mentor to answer the question with any conscious effort. Time seemed to slow down again. Winds picked up and blew back his hood. Closing his eyes against the breeze, Xander breathed heavily from suppressed emotions. After the breeze had passed, Xander opened them again to see the world around them had changed.

He was still holding his combat instructor about the waist as he sat on a ledge, but they were no longer in that awful place. About them were the castle walls of his home on Caladan. Familiar
Atreides banners adorned the great halls, illuminated under suspensor lights. They sat upon a window ledge in the great room before the Duke's private chambers.

Pressing his face in the green uniform of Duncan, Xander sighed with relief. "It was all just a bad dream."

"I am afraid not." Finally giving in to the urge, Duncan forced Xander to release him. He pulled the boy up so they were face to face. "You can not live in a dream world, Paul."

"I can't take it there, it isn't home to me." A stubborn streak made Xander flare his nostrils and try to step away from his mentor. The strong fingers upon his back made him stay.

"Close your eyes." He shushed the boy with a finger over his lips. "Just do it." When Xander complied, he leaned across the short space separating them and pressed his lips against Xander's. The warmth of Xander's relieved exhale blew through their lips opening them further in invitation. Taking advantage of them, Duncan wrapped his arms firmly around Xander's waist.

Xander let the older man have control of the kiss. The pleasure of knowing he could let go made him light headed. Eventually, he was forced to break the kiss when a muscle twinged in his neck from prolonged use. Smiling against the other's lips, Xander opened his eyes. The sight of brown eyes zapped all thought but outrage.

He was about to go for his knife when the memory of those brown eyes came to mind. "Deadboy!" Glancing about him, Xander noted the stars had come out and the sun gone down. "Where are we?"

Shuddering, Angel backed away from Xander. "I'm not sure." He was too lost to think about what had been happening. It just felt off, all of it.

"This is just great." It hurt to look at the other man, he wasn't what Xander wanted, but his body still literally shook with need. He found himself reaching out to touch Angel. Forcing his arm down, Xander swallowed hard. "Uh... I think we had better find out and how we got here."

"Good idea." Pulling his coat back up from his arms and rebuttoning his shirt, Angel glared at Xander. His skin still tingled from the warm touches of the boy's hands. Angel licked his lips, then frowned. "Are you hurt?"

"Now that you mention it." Xander's hand went to the area above his his nipple and massaged it. Feeling bare skin, he glanced down in shock and found his shirt hanging open and the cloak bunched up at his feet. "What did you do to me, Deadboy?" Upon opening his shirt, his head shot up and he glared at Angel. "You bit my nipple!"

Angel backed up a step, raising his hand to ward off Xander. "That's not true, I would remember doing that!"

"There are fang marks around my nipple! There isn't any other vampires around that have been kissing me, it had to be you." Opening his shirt, he displayed the offended flesh to the vampire. "You bit me! I am not a chew toy!"

"I know I didn't, you know how I know? Well, I'll tell you. I'm not flat on my back, that's how I know." Seeing Xander's reaction change from one of outrage to something Angel wasn't ready to go in to at the moment, Angel pointed at his own mouth. "Last time I bit you I was paralyzed for three hours. Your blood is some how toxic to me. So see, see! I'm not... not with you... I would never give you a love bite!"

"Love bite?" Smirking, Xander crossed his arms until he hit the sore nipple then unfolded them. With
nothing else to do, he started to redress himself. "You bit me. Admit it, you were caught up in the throws of passion and bit me."

"I was not!" Angel's voice squeaked, causing him to grow angry. It wasn't a truth, he wasn't feeling weak, in fact the only thing he felt was the need to throttle the annoying boy. "What the hell is going on here, Xander? The last thing I remember is looking forward to a sun rise then nothing."

That made the humor slip from Xander's face. "Still trying to kill yourself?"

"No." Making a face, Angel turned his back on the kid. What the hell was wrong with him, he was acting just like one of these children. Sighing, he hung his head. "I just wanted to see the sun rise, to know that it still could. Lying there, I had plenty of time to think. Inside I was hoping that the poison wouldn't wear off in time, that I would be stuck there till the sun came up. When it started to fade, pain took the place of the numbness. Finally, I hurt, it shook me, made me realize that I was still here. A while after that I could move again and didn't want to die there anymore."

"So you just, what, waited for he sun?" Xander took the few steps between him and Angel, but held back from touching the taller man. "Is that it, you wanted to see the sun start to come up?"

"Yeah, that's it. I wanted to see the sun start to come up because it could. Humans take it forgranted, that they'll see it happen. I just wanted to be one of those people for a change. To know that something that is supposed to happen will." Gazing off in to the distance, Angel could make out the lights of Sunnydale's streets. Despite the dangers involved, people still continued on with their boring, normal lives. "Normal." It was both a wish and a curse.

"Haven't you heard, Normal is on the endangered species list." Feeling the timing was right, Xander came up behind Angel and wrapped his arms around the vampire's chest. Laying his head on Angel's shoulder, Xander tilted it to rest against his neck. "We're all we have left."

"What?" Angel found himself rubbing against the warmth of Xander's body.

"The others are gone or leaving." Xander spoke in a dazed tone, his mind wandering. "Willow's parents are making arrangements to send their daughter to her aunt's in New York. Giles and Jenny are going to England at the end of the month. With Buffy gone, there is no reason for her mother to remain here, she'll be going soon too. They're all gone now." Even as he spoke, Xander could see it in his mind. He saw each of them branching off from his future and going their own ways.

"What do you see for me, Xander? What is going to happen to me?" Feeling Xander's arms slide down his body, Angel swallowed. "Focus, Xander, what is going to happen to me?"

"You'll be fine." He could see it too. There were battles ahead for Angel, chances were he would survive them and continue to fight. Xander could see the lines of futures drawn, in some of them Angel was joined by people, in others he joined with the vampire. In yet another group of possible futures, Angel simply drifted from Sunnydale and vanished in to the night forever. "Wanna fuck?"

"What?" Angel pulled out of Xander's arms and faced the dazed looking young man.

"I said do you want to fight?" Still with a far off look, he reached up and cupped Angel's face. "You should really fight, Angel. If you simply give up, you disappear."

Seeing the distance grow in the boy's gaze, Angel felt a spike of concern for him. "Xander, what are you talking about?"

"Fight, you have to fight. It's the only..." The words became to difficult to say and Xander let his mind drift. He was losing control again. Staring at Angel's face, he fought to focus his eye upon the
vampire. It was taking all his effort, but it was working. "Your future is clear if you make certain choices. You will survive only if you continue to fight. Give up this one battle and the war is lost to you forever." Wrapping his free hand around Angel's neck, he pulled the man to him. "You must find something worth holding on to, something worth fighting for. I can't... I..." Then his concentration slipped and Xander was no longer standing on Earth.

Glancing about him, Xander saw the dunes for miles behind him. Ahead, in the direction he had been traveling lay the rock formations of the Sietch. Housed inside this place was the Stunted Maker. That is what he sought, that which he would become himself.

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Entering the library, Angel glanced around at the stacks of books. The site didn't surprise so much as disappoint him. Shrugging in his jacket, he looked for Giles. When he spotted the Watcher placing books in one of the myriad of boxes, he moved towards him. "So he was correct."

"Ahhhh!" Giles jumped back from his box, dropping the books in the box. Seeing who it was, he reached let the cross around his neck drop. "Angel, you are still here? When you failed to show at Buffy's wake this morning, I thought you gone."

"I'm not sure where I was or what I was doing. Kinda hard to explain." Shrugging, Angel looked for a something to distract himself. "Xander says you are leaving for England. You and this Ms. Calendar woman?"

"Oh? I wasn't aware she had spoken of it to him." Adjusting his glasses, Giles bent over to retrieve his books. Standing up again, he frowned. "That's not right, Jenny only came to the decision tonight. How did Xander know... The Spice, of course." Giles turned around and headed for the book desk. "Where is Xander, it is of the utmost importance that I speak with him right away."

"He's gone."

"Excuse me?" Pausing, Giles let his hand drop to his side.

"I said, he's gone. Xander isn't here anymore." Reaching in to his coat, Angel pulled out a well worn book. Tossing it to Giles, he put his hand back in to his pocket. "I did a little research of my own in the sixties and seventies. Things that were used to expand the mind, if you get my meaning."

After catching the book and staring at it, Giles opened the worn out cover to see the title. "Dune?"

"Yeah, pretty straight forward stuff if you can overlook the posturing and endless descriptive babble." Coming to stand beside the open box, Angel glanced down at the contents. "The book was part of the group reading requirements passed out by our Demon Guru. He was full of shit, but the book was fun to read when wasted on reefer."

"Demon Guru?" Giles was still stunned by the fact the vampire had a copy of the book he had spent countless fruitless hours searching every book store within two hundred miles for.

"Yeah, we were looking for enlightenment, atonement, freedom of minds and souls. The usual stuff for demons who want to be good. Turns out he was just another drug dealer looking to score some easy money by turning us seekers of enlightenment in to addicts. Didn't work, but the buzz we got from eating him kept us high for a month. After that I swore never to touch the stuff again. Good thing, too, shortly after that LSD hit the scene. A few of the group took some and lets just say that wasn't exactly the summer of love."

Giles cleared his throat. "Is there a point to this?"
"Oh, yeah, there was." Facing Giles, Angel took on a serious expression. "Xander's dead."

"Explain yourself, now!" Feeling his anger grow, Giles reached for his cross.

"Doesn't matter what you or anyone does, Xander is gone in his own mind and he's not coming back. There are moments he is Xander, but for the most part that isn't Xander walking around out there. It's someone, something else, and pretty soon, that's all there will be left." Pointing at the book, Angel nodded his head. "The answer is in there."

"What should I do?"

"Hope that whatever he eventually becomes isn't even half as scary as what Paul became."

Standing back in the stacks, Willow shook her head in denial. It couldn't have been true. Xander wasn't gone, she was going to prove it. Slipping out quietly back through the side entrance, she hoped she could still predict him enough to find him before something happened.

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Standing in the raftors of the Bronze, Willow gazed down upon the crowd, searching for Xander. Not seeing the familiar brown hair, she sighed in frustration. She had tried all their usual childhood haunts, school yards, and even his house. After ten minutes of apologizing for not coming by sooner to Xander's mother, she had finally freed herself long enough to run here.

Off towards the couch, Cordelia and her Cordettes sat surrounded by boys and hangers on. Bitterness rose up in Willow, it should have been her, Buffy and Xander there, not that stuck up tramp. Catching her own thoughts, Willow's eyes went wide. Those weren't her thoughts, she wasn't a bad person. It was just the stress of the situation.

Losing Buffy, not being able to find Xander, her parent's secret negotiations with New York relatives she had heard over the extension in the kitchen, all combined to make it hard to be her usual cheerful, sunny self. Lowering her head, Willow sniffed. "Where are you when I need you?"

Willow looked up again to continue scanning the crowd. There was a pretty decent size one tonight, which was shocking considering that it was only three days since the Slayer died. She suspected the reason most of these kids were still alive were because Buffy and Xander had finished off the major bad guys of the vampire community last week. Another bout of bitterness made her wish a vampire attack would happen right now, even if just to shut their revelry up.

The smell of Cinnamon on the wind blowing through the vents behind her made Willow turn slowly to search the upper deck of the Bronze. Her eyes were drawn to a figure in a green cloak. Slowly, a pair of glowing blue eyes opened to stare at her and Willow felt her heart stop. Taking a step back she pressed against the arm rail.

It took her a moment to remember this was Xander. When she did she started out across the deck towards him. Half way there, she blinked and he disappeared. She frantically searched for him, spinning left and right to locate him. The moment he appeared in front of her, she screamed and jumped back.

Xander's hand shot out, fingers covering her mouth. Shaking his head slowly from side to side, he smiled at her.

Willow reached up to grab his hand but it was withdrawn before she could touch him. "Xander? Oh, Xander, it's you!"
Cocking his head, Xander blinked at her. He stepped in closer to her, face unreadable.

"Xander, where have you been? I have been searching all over for you, it is horrible! Buffy is gone and my parents are sending me to my aunt's and Giles is heading back to England! What is happening, Xander? What..." She was silenced by him stepping closer to her again. Eyes wide, she stepped back from him.

Xander raised one gloved hand. Stripping it, he wiggled the fingers. He caressed her cheek with the fingers and closed his eyes.

Staring in shock at her best friend, Willow froze on the spot. Inside, she could feel the extreme heat of his touch, but was only distantly aware that it wasn't natural. Something unknown, almost alien tugged at the corners of her mind, making it hard to focus. She tried to think of what was happening, but memories of the past three days began to replay in her mind.

She was forced to relive the devastating moments, from discovering Buffy broken in the pile of metal at the water tower, to the hospital where she was almost arrested. The hours of waiting for any information on her friend were crushed under the grief and relief she felt when Buffy finally died. Days of sulking in her room til this morning's funeral. The last thing she remembered before coming to herself again in the club was the sight of Buffy's corpse in the large black coffin.

Rubbing tears from her eyes, Willow bit her lip. "Xander, please stop. I don't want this." When she opened her eyes, she was standing alone on the upper deck. The club was dark and the people gone. "Xander? Hello? Anyone?"

"What do you want, Willow?"

Spinning around, Willow traced the sound of the voice that sounded similar to Xander's only completely emotionless. "Where are you, Xander?"

"What do you want?"

"I want my best friend!" Not being able to find him, she made for the stairs. She continued to strain the limits of her sight in the dark building in hopes of seeing him. "What is going on, Xander?"

"I am remembering."

"Remembering what?" Willow thought she caught sight of movement off to her right, but when she looked, there was no one there.

"There are things in this Universe, Willow. Things so vast it would rip the sanity from your mind if you could comprehend them. You are so tiny, insignificant in the face of such beings."

A strong wave of fear clenched in her gut. Stopping, she just stared ahead. "Is that what happened to you? Did one of them attack you?"

Laughter filled the Bronze. Willow didn't like that laugh. There was something about this entire situation that felt surreal. Reaching in her jacket, she pulled out a cross. "What is so funny, Xander?"

"You're asking the wrong questions." His voice echoed in the Bronze, going deeper with each word. "Perhaps it would help if I gave you a clue, Willow."

She was about to ask what kind of clue when the world in front of her exploded in to a desert. Rising
from the sand was a great scaley worm that screamed at her. Its sound shook the ground beneath her feet and caused her to shriek in fear. The next moment she was back in the darkened club. "Xander? You're scaring me. Please stop."

Stepping out from behind a pillar on the other side of the room, Xander shook his head. "Give up?"
"Please."

He blurred for a moment then appeared directly in front of her. His eyes glowing blue in the lack of light, he grinned at her. Xander opened his mouth wide. The roar that came out shook the entire foundation of the building and tossed her off her feet.

As Willow came crashing down, she blinked in pain. Bright lights and shadows filled her vision. Slowly, they formed into shapes and she could make out people standing over her. It took her a moment to realize she was on the second level of the Bronze, laying back. Several people were kneeling around her looking startled.

Sitting up, Willow pushed their hands off her. She tried looking around for Xander, but her muscles weakened and she fell back again. Only a pair of strong arms prevented her from hitting the floor. It didn't matter anyways, Xander was gone again.

She tried placing together what she knew with the images Xander had shown her. That had definitely been a sand worm, and Xander had sounded exactly like it when he screamed at her. It didn't make sense, what did they have to do with each other?

"Shai-Hulud leaves nothing in his wake. His passing will cleanse the world."

The whispered words sent a chill down Willow's spine. Suddenly, the strong arms holding her up disappeared and she was once again falling to the floor. This time she made it with a thump and a feeling of dread.

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Putting down the book, Giles rubbed at his head. He had been reading the book for the past three hours, understanding less with each word. Looking up at the pacing Angel, he sighed. "What is the meaning of all this? What exactly is Paul becoming?"

"The one who can be many places at once." Not looking up from the book he was flipping through, Angel turned to bodily face Giles. "In the novel, Humans were advanced enough to tap into the genetic memory of their ancestors, share these memories with others with the same power. These Humans were women, thus in the book there was a limit to their power. Typical male attitude of the time, not very believable. Anyways, what Paul could do was see the future as well as know the past and the present. He was omniscient, knows all, sees all."

"The destination of a god." That clinched it for Giles. This was definitely not a good thing. His mind started filling out all he knew about such abilities. "That would be more than a normal person could tolerate, it would destroy the most resilient of minds."

"Exactly. It was speculated by our group that Paul ended up going insane like most Humans who come in to great power. Either that, or he was the rare exception and simply ceased to be Human altogether." There was another option, but Angel wasn't about to tell Giles that. It was the most dangerous scenario for Xander's transformation, and the least likely one meant to be comforting.

"Then what do you suggest we do about this?" There was nothing worse to Giles than feeling helpless. It was the worst thing in his life as a Watcher. He has stood by helpless as Buffy went out
each night, he was helpless when she died, he was helpless to spare the children the pain of life. The entire situation only served to strengthen his resolve to return to London.

Angel closed the book. "Nothing."

"Excuse me?" He couldn't believe what he heard.

"Nothing. Xander is another casualty in the war."

"Then why did you bring this here? Why tell me all this?" Storming to stand in front of the vampire, Giles glared at him.

"You had the right to know." Shrugging, Angel put the book back in Giles' box. With a final look, he turned for the door. "Keep the book."

Giles nodded absently. As he ruminated on what Angel had said, his jaw clenched. A special hatred welled up inside of him for a former colleague. He was going to hunt that bastard down and extract every last price from his skin.

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Outside the library, Angel shrugged deeper in his jacket. It wasn't his problem now. He had done what was needed, what became of the boy now was out of his hands. That was taken from his mind by the slamming of a car through his legs. Collapsing on the hood, he gasped for unneeded breath and glanced up through the windshield to see who had hit him.

Peering through the blackened glass, Drusilla blinked at Angel.

"Oh hell." Lowering himself on the hood, Angel tried to force his body off the car. His efforts were invain as his lower half refused to respond. "What next?"

"My poor, sweet Angel, I'll mend your broken wings."

Angel found himself being dragged by his broken legs off the hood of the car. His head slammed down on the bumper before bouncing on the concrete. "Dru!"

Glancing over her shoulder, Drusilla smiled at Angel. She kept dragging him around the car towards the open door. "Yes, my sweet?"

"Let me go, now!" He tried to grab on to something, but he was wrenched off the ground and tossed in to the back seat. Angel landed on another body with a grunt. As the door closed, he sighed. This was just great.

"Hey, watch where you land, bloody poof!" Unable to move from the neck down, Spike was forced to remain under Angel's large bulk.

"Oh god, what have I done to deserve this?"

Drusilla closed the driver's side door and put the car in gear. Smiling, she looked up in to the rearview mirror at her boys. Such a wonderful feeling to have her family back together again.

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Standing on the cliff over looking the ocean, Xander knew what had happened to Angel and snickered. It was fitting. He knew it wouldn't take long for Angel to get his body healed, but in the mean time he would be in Drusilla's tender mercies. The image of Angel in a sun bonnet and booties
made him double over in laughter.

Slowly, the ocean's continuous pull eventually pulled him from his humor. There was a purpose to his being here. He had known it would eventually come to this. Before he got it over with, he wanted to take in the world one last time. His lungs filled with the heady scent of the ocean breeze and he nearly choked. As it was, he began to weep.

"Too much beauty is a dangerous thing." The dark skinned young woman climbed the last few feet to the cliff top and stopped beside Xander. "I've seen this place in my dreams, yet they could do no justice for its majesty."

"You are early." Reaching inside his cloak, Xander rest his hand upon the inner pocket. "You can't stop me, if that is what you hoped."

"It wasn't my intention. You got to do what you came to do, I am merely here to watch over you while it's done." Reaching out, she grasped the stone face and leaned back against it. Using her hand to steady herself, Kendra slid down to sit upon a large rock. "Whenever you're ready, go on ahead."

Nodding his agreement, Xander forced himself through the sudden welling of fear. It took him a moment to lift the pocket's clother latch and reach inside with shaking fingers to pull out the jar inside. Staring at the blue liquid inside, he swallowed. "Right. Let's go."

When all he did was stand there staring at the jar, Kendra tapped her hand against her thigh. "You going to stand there all day, young sir?"

"No. I guess not." With a smirk, he uncapped the jar. "Here goes nothing." He put the jar to his lips without spilling a drop. Exhaling slowly, he tipped his head back and downed the entire jar in a single swallow. The effect was immeadiet.

Liquid fire shot through his throat and Xander dropped the jar. He tried screaming, but found his muscles paralized. Xander sank to the ground, eyes burning from poison stinging its way through his body. Slowly, he fell back against the ground and the world burst in to vivid splashes of color.

All around him swirls of color raged out of control, memories of pasts he could barely comprehend filled his mind. Knowledge of ancient beings long dead came flooding through him along with the memories of their existance. Places he had never visited now seemed to have been his home all his life, unknown people became the most intimate of friends.

He was a smith in a village. He was a priest praying over the masses. He was an arch evenger, protecting his charges with an unholy fire. He was the last of a race of soul warriors bent on taking their revenge out of those who had hunted them to extinction. He was the savior to all, instruement of evolution, tool of nature.

Paul opened his eyes. Choking on the poisonous water of life that had been poured down his throat a second time, he forced his mind and body to change it. He knew how to alter the molecular structure so that it would no longer contain the toxic properties which made it so dangerous. He could do it.

Turning on his side, he spit up the excess water upon the sand. The sickening strong scent of Cinnamon filled his entire being and he knew it had happened. He had changed the Water, he was the one, the true one. As the kind young woman pat his back, Paul clasped her hand in his own. "Thank you."

"What little comfort I can give, I will. Your existance is far from easy from this point on." Rubbing a hand through his sweat soked hair, she glanced up at the rising sun behind them. "Today you will
rest, recoup your strength. Tonight you face the great beast.”

"Shai-Hulud." Tugging at her hand, Paul held it over his chest. "The worm is called Shai-Hulud."

"Shhh, rest boy. Until tonight, the beast, Shai-Hulud, whatever he prefers to be called, can wait. You must give this body a chance to recover from your rising, Paul Atreides." Clenching his hand in her own, she pulled the hand from his hair to caress his cheek. "Very soon, Paul."

Closing his eyes, Paul nodded gratefully to her. He needed sleep, time to recover. On the edge of his mind he could see the tasks before him and it made him feel weary deep in his bones. But that would have to wait.

Standing off to the side on a higher cliff rise, Whistler watched Paul with regret. "Too soon a sacrifice, kid. Just your luck."

Willow staggered in the door of her parent's house, closing the door with as strong a toss as she could muster. She didn't care that her parents would hear it, so weary was she. It had taken the last of her strength to get home without running in to anyone who might want to hurt her. At this point in time, though, the couldn't have cared less.

Life had gone steadily down hill for the past two weeks. Now that Xander was pushing her away, there was nothing left to hold on to here. He had been the last vestage of life in SunnyDale that had made it bareable. Lowering herself back against the door, she put a hand to her stinging face. She wasn't going to cry for them anymore, or so she thought.

The noise of the door closing had alerted her mother, who had been sitting in the living room waiting for Willow to get home. Sheila came around the front room to stand in the door way to the entrance hall. Hands on hips, she was about to lay in to her daughter about her activities, but the sight of Willow made her gasp. "Willow?"

"I want to go to New York with Aunt Sylvie." Her voice a monotone, Willow refused to look up at her mother. What was the point? Sheila was just going to send her away anyways.

"I was hoping you'd say that. Your father is worried about you." Crossing her arms, Sheila leaned in to the doorway. Her actions unconsciously mirrored her daughter's. "He waited up as long as he could, but he has work today. For that matter, so do I."

"I don't care. You got what you wanted, now leave me alone." Sliding up the door, Willow adjusted her clothes to be comfortable again. It worked better than she had hoped, her mother wasn't even talking to her now. Walking towards the stairs, she passed by her mother without looking up. If she wanted her daughter sent away like an unwanted burden, then she had given up her right to be treated like her mother in Willow's opinion.

Sheila continued to watch her daughter pass by. This she had been expecting, the parent help pamphlets at the parent-teen crises center had said so. Still, it hurt that her normally so cheerful and friendly daughter lashed out at her. When Willow's foot steps had disappeared in the early morning quiet of the house, Sheila turned back for the living room and walked away.

Joyce glanced about the house, looking for something she might have missed. The place was immaculate from all her cleaning. Several pictures that had caused too many bad memories were removed from the walls leaving the place bare. Ornaments she had been aquiring because they fit in
well with the house were being sold in the gallery. All in all the house was pretty much empty.

Making her way down the steps, she glanced over at her empty living room. If she tried hard enough, she could still see Buffy on the couch watching TV tossing pop corn at Xander or giggling at Willow. The memory made her smile. It was one of the many they had made while living here.

She was going to miss SunnyDale.

Sighing, Joyce adjusted the hat pinned in place over a scarf. She had read in her art books about the tribes of the world’s mourning customs. After removing images of the dead, they would alter their appearance to show what they felt in the inside. She had been drunk and took a pair of sheers to her hair. Now that she was sober, she felt pretty silly, thus the hat, but she felt a little better despite it.

She took the last few steps and came to stop at the door. A final glance in to the dining room revealed nothing missed. Bending down, she opened the doors, picked up her suit cases and walked out. She heard Illinois was pretty this time of year.

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On the edge of town, sheriff's deputies continued to sift through the remains of a large camp site. There wasn't much left of the camp site itself, but there were bits and pieces scattered about. Deputy Swanson was examining a large piece of propein tank that appeared to have exploded. Right now the general consensus was that the tanks had exploded and destroyed the bulk of the camp.

He would have been fine with that if the blasted thing had explosion marks. Instead, this seemed to have been... chewed. However, the teeth marks were unlike anything he had ever seen before. Another thing that had been disturbing was the size of the teeth marks on things. Not from SunnyDale, he felt he was the only one to take the threat of something large like this serious.

His one time at mentioning something that wasn't quite normal had earned him a stern warning and a visit with the shrink. He wasn't looking forward to a repeat performance.

Another thing that bothered him was the fact that so much of the sand around him seemed to have been disturbed. He could handle if there were tracks or blast patterns, it was just that, the sheer size of the area effected was beyond his colleague's imaginations. It was like the sand had exploded from beneath them all, sending pieces of the camp in all directions for over two miles.

Nothing he knew, except a mine, could cause that big of a disimination of debris. Then again, the there were no scorch marks, so that was out of the question. It made no sense.

Swanson felt a termor in the Earth and paused. It could be a aftershock to the Earth quake they had experienced yesterday in this area. That was another option, a pocket of gas had exploded from beneath the ground. It would explain the lack of scorching and where the people went. The gas would have turned the sand in to liquid and anything above it would have sunk.

It was a grisly death, that was for sure. But that wouldn't explain the bite marks in the propein tank.

The quake grew in size, causing him to worry. Another buble of gas might be rising. Feeling it best to get out of there while the area was still so unstable, he stood up. His actions were just in time to see the sand fifty feet from where three deputies had been walking towards the sheriff with a large piece of car shell exploded up in to the sky.

Swanson watched in horror as something black shot out of the earth, screeching an unearthly wail. Its groan was so deep it caused his bones to ache in sympathetic vibration. On it went higher, causing the ground beneath him to shake and him to fall. So big that it blocked out the sky as far as the eye
could see.

"Mother of god!" Covering his eyes, he scrambled to get back from it. When the creature stopped rising, it bent down toward the Earth, crashing faster than he could move. His shriek of wild fear was the last thing he ever did as the maul of the great worm swallowed him whole.
Paul came awake with a hunger so deep, he grabbed at the closest thing that he could get his hands on so he could consume it. His actions were for not as whatever it was, was not keen on being eaten. He tried to grab it again, teeth bared in a growl. This time he was tossed in to the stone face of the cliff for his efforts. Gasping, he forced the hunger down and rational thought returned. Shaking his head, Paul ran a hand through his short brown hair. "Forgive me, I am not myself."

"The beast effects your mind. It is not your hunger, but his." Pressing her hand to examine his body, Kendra forced him to accept her touch. "You are not too harmed." She let him go and turned to face the path back down the cliffs. "Tonight has come, you must prepare for battle with the beast."

"I'm not going to fight the Maker." Sitting up, Paul coughed to clear his lungs. The night air had filled his mouth with salt and dust from the winds. Spitting the fowl taste from his mouth, Paul glanced over at the Slayer. "The sand worm is too big to fight, even with the most advanced weapons of this era, the blasts would be too great."

"Then you face a bigger challenge than my dreams led me to believe. My Watcher said to keep an eye out for you as well, what could he have meant by that?" Despite the fact no weapons were showing, Kendra had six daggers at the ready to be used on this strange boy if he even so much as flinched now.

Smiling, Paul suddenly appeared directly in front of her. "I have no idea." Holding up all six of her daggers, Paul handed them back to her. "There are many things about this world that still try to ellude my mental grasp, but I know more than They want me to see." Reaching out quickly, he rubbed at the area behind her left ear. "On my world I am a god."

Kendra's eyes started to droop as she felt her body began to relax. She fell against Paul, her fingers desperately trying to fight off the false malaise. "What are you doing to me, boy?"

"I do not require a shadow in this world. Your part in this is now complete." His voice increased in pitch, taking on the dual quality of his Bene Gesserit training. "Rest, Slayer, your strength will be needed in the aftermath."

"Tired." Closing her eyes, Kendra nodded. "I believe I'll sleep now."

Gently lowering her to the ground, Paul pressed a kiss to her forehead. She was far from the one he had expected to be here, but she was still of the same species at least. The other one must have already died trying to fight the Makers. Casting about for the sense of the Makers, he found only one, not the three that had been planted here.

Paul raised his head. "Where are the other two?"

"Freaky how you do that." Adjusting his collar uncomfortably, Whistler came the few feet down the cliff face to stand beside Paul. "One died, as you already know, to bring you back. The second, well, it kinda met up with a crazy old Human with a stick of dynamite. Was a spectacular explosion."

"I see." Standing again, Paul stared out over the water and watch the last dying rays of the sun sink in to the sea. Like a great beast, it refused to give up even as it disappeared behind the waves, sending red flames up over the horizon. "Magnificent. I have never seen it from this angle before."

"So, you gonna get on with this or not? Time's a ticking and that not so little beast of yours is getting older." Whistler raised his wrist, glancing at the watch. "According to my bosses, you were given a
certain amount of time to ensure the future happens. You fail, that beast destroys the world, and no one lives long enough for happily ever after."

"I am well aware of the stakes, Goblin. Your masters were supposed to ensure this never happened." Paul pulled up the hood of his cloak. "If they hadn't been slacking off, none of this would have happened and I would still be a figure in a novel."

"Hey, so they screwed up. At least they left you entact so you could deal with it. You got your memory back, which means you can kill the big worms for them. That's their way of doing things, minimal interference." Snorting, Whistler watched the boy walk down the cliff path. It took him a moment to realize he had been insulted. "Hey! I'm not a Goblin, asshole!" When Paul simply continued on, ignoring him, Whistler flipped him off. "Punks these days!"

Putting the last of the boxes in his trunk, Giles turned to stare at the school wistfully. Despite the large scale of evil and potential evil in this building, he had felt at home here. He would admit there were times when the American children would grate on his last good nerve til he wanted to just stuff a scone in their mouths. Other times he wanted to die of embarrassment after learning just what exactly they had been talking about, really, children that age should not have such language.

Yes, there were many memories attached to this place. He would miss them all, even those that had hurt him the most. Despite the fact that he lost someone very dear to him here, it would always be a part of him. Giles silently vowed only to think on this place with fondness.

With a sigh, he closed the trunk of this little car that had served him so well in the past and would now go back to its final resting place at the Watcher's Council parking lot in Las Angeles. There wasn't much choice in the matter, he couldn't very well keep it. Back to England where the cars were designed properly and people drove on the correct side of the road, the left.

There was just the little matter of locking up the school and then it would be all done with. Turning back to the school, Giles was shocked to find his way blocked by a cloaked figure again. This time he was ready for him. He pulled out the gun and took aim at what appeared to be a man. "Who are you?"

"I could ask you the same thing, Rupert Giles." Smiling at the gun, the boy waved it off.

Giles found himself lowering the gun despite the alarm still inside him. Every time he tried to focus on trying to raise it again, his mind was distracted from its presence. "What are you?"

"Benevolence. Destruction. Survival. Life giver. All these things and more. And less." Stepping closer, Paul raised his gloved hand again. When his palm made contact with Giles' cheek, he flooded the man with a sense of overwhelming warmth and acceptance. "This is the power that they feared. I can control the minds of the many, I can manipulate them to feel whatever I want."

"Mau'dib." Basking in the feeling permeating his entire body, Giles leaned in to Paul's touch. He found himself lowering his head to rest upon his shoulder, tears filling his eyes. "Please, forgive me." Abruptly the feeling was yanked from him and Giles cried out from the return of his own life. The lack of comfort was almost unbareably painful to him.

"That is the same reaction I get from all whom I touch. Disgust and pity is all I can summon for those so effected. They are mere tools to be used if they can not over come the force of my personality." Letting the man go, Paul stepped back from him. When Giles crumpled to his knees, Paul ignored him. "I'm not really here, this is just an implanted memory you are living out at this moment. You
will come to standing next to your car once more staring at this building and I will have already gone once more. It is a little trick my sister taught me, is teaching me, or will teach me. Time is a funny thing."

"Why? What is going on?" Giles had to clear his throat three times before he could speak clearly. Even then, his voice came out in a husky whisper.

"I needed a few tools from your car. Things I am sure the airlines won't let you bring on board. It isn't much, just a few tools that are necessary in taming the beast." Looking up at the sky, Paul seemed distracted. "Shai-Hulud is calling me, it is time. Good bye, Rupert Giles."

"Wait!" But Giles found himself shouting the word in the empty parking lot. He glanced down at his watch and realized it couldn't have been more than a moment that he was distracted. Remembering Paul's words, he moved around the car to check the back seat. He found the door open and his weapons chest opened.

He reached in to the chest to check for missing weapons and came away with a frown. Nothing that he could remember had been taking. It seemed to have been ransacked though. "May be he couldn't find what he was looking for." Stating it for no one in particular, he climbed further in the back of the car. Beside the weapons chest was a large leather satchel where he kept his spell books. It had been unbuckled and the contents removed.

Giles racked his brain for which book had been in the pocket and came up with one that he didn't really like. "A water arts book. What would he want with that?"

Thunder cracked over head as a lightening bolt hit the parking lot in front of his car. Then it came to him.

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As the thunder shook the windows of her second story bedroom, Willow stuffed another sweater in the trash bag. Anything cute, cuddly, or kitteny was going in the trash. The Willow that arrived in New York was going to be a new Willow. Goth was still cool in New York, she had heard, may be all black would be the thing for her.

Looking at her red skirts and white blouses, she sighed. Well, not all black, may be just some dark clothes. Staring at the eye liner on her vanity, she sighed. One thing she was going to have to learn was how to put it on without pricking herself in the eye with it. The word prick made her giggle until she realized how very ungoth like that was.

Sobering up, Willow went back to her task of weeding out all childish clothes from her wardrobe. When she left, it would be no more Willow, she would have to choose another name for herself. Wills was also out, it was reserved for a select few people who were now out of reach. What she needed was something that said 'don't mess with me, unless you want to party'.

The flash of lightening striking the ground just outside her window made her screeh in fear. Dropping the sack she ran for the door. The lights all around her flickered speeding up her steps in to the hall towards the stairs. "Mom!"

"Down here, honey, we have the weather on and supper will be ready soon." Sheila ran a hand over her hair before wiping her hands off on her robe. Turning around, she smiled at her husband. "Right?"

"Yes, another ten minutes." Pulling on the oven mits, he looked up in time to see his daughter run in
to the room, her hair frizzing out. "Willow, please do something with your hair, it looks like you stuck your finger in a light socket."

"Yours too!" Pointing at her father, Willow began to giggle again. This time, she didn't stop herself. The nervous fear had to have an outlet. Again the lights flickered. "What is happening?"

"I'm not certain, this has never happened before." Sheila walked over to the window. Peering through the slightly parted curtains, she fought the rising panic. In all directions she saw rising waves of lightening making the world appear as brilliant as a camera flash. "Very strange."

Splashing cold water on her face, Jenny groaned from the deep throbbing ache behind her eyes. She knew that if she looked in the mirror, solid black eyes would greet her. Black magic was in the air and it was summoning something deep from within her. It had been ages since she last practiced it but the long lessons were already itching on her finger tips.

Taking a deep breath, she forced her mind to focus. She had to get to Rupert immeadietly and warn him. He had to know. Despite the fact there was no slayer, they were still the best hope against dark forces in Sunnydale.

A lightening strike outside her bathroom window made her jump back from the sink. It was too much for her and the magic broke free from her. Waving a hand fear to protect herself from the noise, she summond up the wall tiles to act like a shield. They shot from their mortar to stand in front of her.

Realizing what she had done, Jenny let the spell drop. "I've got to get out of here now!" She made a dash for the door, grabbing her purse and coat along the way.

Standing high upon the cliffs over looking the ocean, Paul continued to read the spell for summoning the rains. He needed more water for this to work and the longer he spoke the words, the more the clouds would build. That it was creating lightening and thunder as a by product was an unfortunate. He would not stop now, it was the only way.

The actions of one Chaos Mage had set these events in to motion, bringing him forth. Along with Paul, the damned fool had summoned the sand trout that night two weeks ago. Sand trout were the basic jelly like slugs that came together in a Maker nest, the nest had formed baby sand worms. He had probably thought it a fun little expirement.

Paul had made a deal with the beings who called themselve The Powers That Be while the host body's mind wandered through his memories. He saw the future, knew the sand worms were coming and that he was the only one who would know how to stop them. That involved allowing him to resurface and control the host. His abilities would over run the host's mind in the process, costing him his sense of self. Eventually the host had ceased to exist and all that remained was Paul.

Sadness for the loss of his host made Paul pause for a second, long enough to distract him from the spell. He could feel the storm start to slip from his control and tighted his mind around it. In responce, lightening exploded across the sky, blinding him.

Curling his fingers around the binding of the book, Paul continued to read the words written in ancient blood. "Dues mos, con tinu wah enut. Enhut con tinu weh. Dues mos, con tinue wah enut. Enhut con tinue weh." Thunder drowned out the sound of his voice.
Appearing behind Paul, Whistler covered his ears against the storm. "What the hell are you doing?"
A bolt of lightening struck the ground at his feet and he jumped to avoid it. He was sent rolling down the cliff to bump in to Paul's legs. When he looked up, blinking the brilliance from his eyes, he glared at Paul. "This wasn't part of the deal!"

"Silence!" A blast of light struck the ground behind Paul, nearly hitting Whistler.

"Okay! I can take a hint." Sitting up, Whistler looked for his hat. This was going great. He had expected something out of Indiana Jones or maybe a bad movie. Something along the lines of lassoing the worm and riding it to the pits of a volcano. This summoning of a hurricane was far from that.

"Enhut con tinu weh!" The last words finished, Paul sagged forward and the strength of the spell dragged its power from him. He slowly closed the book, using sheer force of will to make his limbs move. Breathing heavily was the only physical sign he would allow to show he was weakened. The sagging part he wasn't going to acknowledge unless brought up.

Recognizing his chance, Whistler tugged at Paul's cloak. "What the hell is going on, kid? I thought you were gonna deal with the worm, not prove every meterologist in the state wrong."

Sighing heavily, Paul righted himself. He shook the offending demon's hand off his cloak and put the book under his arm. "The only true threat to the Makers was the dream of every Fremen." Waving an arm towards the clouds as they moved over the land towards the desert beyond Sunnydale, he coughed. "Paradise on Arrakis."

"Paradise?" It took Whistler a moment to understand. "You're going to drown the worm." Watching the storm, he couldn't help but admire the sheer size of it. "I think that might be enough."

"More so." Paul was about to take a step forward when he fell down to one knee. He tried to stand up, but his legs gave out all together and he collapsed to the ground. "I believe I may have over done it."

"No, kid, you didn't." Moving to stand over the fading Paul, Whistler shook his head. "Your kind of abilities can't last very long in a mortal body, humans just aren't strong enough, even with that drug you're so fond of." He knelt beside Paul, a hand reaching out to brush the dark hair from his face.

A deep chill spread through out his limbs. It was growing steadily harder to breathe as time passed. "I can't..." Blinking, Paul shook his head. "Can't think. So tired."

"Rest, kid, you deserved it." When Paul's eyes flashed open, Whistler shook his head and forced them closed again.

"This can't be." After a brief struggle, Paul lost to his fiteague. "I've seen the... future! I live." He gasped for breath only to end up coughing again. "I live."

"No, you don't." It was almost done, he could see it now. "Just let go, it will be quicker."

Paul shook his head weakly in denial. He tried to focus on the simple task of keeping his body breathing, heart pumping, but that was proving too difficult. Even as his heart slowed, he struggled to keep it going. Eventually, the muscle simply stopped. Paul felt his grip on the host slip completely.

Whistler let Paul go. It was better this way. Glancing up, he saw the black slayer make her way along the cliff top towards them. "He's all yours now."

"You can go back to your masters, demon, I can take it from here." Ignoring the Balance Demon,
Kendra knelt beside Paul. "That wasn't a nice thing to do with me, boy, I could have prevented this." Picking him up by the chest first, she took a deep breath. "Boy, you weigh a ton!"

Eventually, Kendra got him off the ground. Straining, she staggered down the cliff face towards the parking lot below. Her...borrowed car was waiting there. As she walked, cold winds blew back from the town, the last vestages of the storm. She thought it strangely fitting that he would die under such a sky.

In the desert, out among the broken sands and half formed dunes a creature of unearthly origins raised its maul towards the sky. Crying in pain, it desperately turned to avoid the stinging rain. Torrents fell upon it from all directions and soaked in to the ground turning the sand in to a muddy ocean.

The earth shook from the great beast's tail slapping it in attempt to shake the liquid from its body. Rolling over proved to be no help, the mud being deeper here. Great amounts of soaked earth stuck to it, making it impossible for the worm's scales to allow it movement. It roared once more in to the night.

Lightening struck the great beast's snout, blackening the scales there. It cried out in pain, buring its face in the mud to alleviate the pain. Instead of helping, the actions forced water and mud deep inside the worm's mouth. It tried to vomit up the mud but more ran inside every time it opened its mouth.

Snapping violently to remove the surrounding mud, it only made room for more water to pour down upon it. Soon the worm had sunk so deep in the mud its movements became constricted. The great worm screamed in frustration before collapsing forward in to the water filled pit. It tried to breath through the water once, twice before its movements settled in to tiny spasm.

Eventually all movement ceased and mud filled in the hole over the great worm. All the while, rain continued to pour down upon the desert.

Outside the city morgue, Kendra parked the borrowed car. With a put upon sigh, she turned to the back seat. The lifeless figure of the boy still made her a little angry. It wasn't her fault he was dead, yet it felt like she had a hand in it. There was nothing to be done for him now.

She was about to reach out and touch his forehead, but pulled back before she could reach him. There was nothing she could do for him now. With a final glance over him, she shifted back to the front and opened the door. The weather was still bordering on freezing in her limited experience.

Watching the lightening strikes in the east, she slammed the door shut and walked away. It was the most beautiful storm she had ever seen, and prayed it was the last one of that magnitude she had to see. Having survived it was all well and good, but having to go through it once was more than enough.

Inside the car, blue within blue eyes opened.

Sitting in a chair next to the fire place, Giles nursed a glass of brandy. This had been the first and only chance he ever got to use this bloody fire place and he planned on taking full advantage of it. The cold winds and rain had dropped the temperature of the town to near freezing in his opinion. Then again, in London this time of year it would probably feel down right balmy.
He was about to take another sip when a loud banging on his door made him drop the glass. Cursing, he threw a towel over the mess as he stood up and headed for the door. "Who is it?"

"Rupert! Open up, I need to speak with you!" On the other side of the door, Jenny Calendar was shivering from the rain. This had been the worst exposure of dark arts she had felt in all her years. Her bones still ached from the exposure. "Come on, Rupert, I'm not wearing... pants. Thank you!" She rushed in to the building as he opened the door.

"What are you doing here? I thought we were to meet up in the morning, not that this is unwelcome," Closing the door behind him, he ushered her over to the chair in front of the fire. "Is there something the matter?"

"There was dark magic being used tonight. More than I have ever felt in one location before."

Glancing up at him as she pulled the shawl off the back of the chair on her shoulders, she paused. "You know something about this?"

Giles nodded. There was no reason why he should lie to her about the situation in his opinion. "Xander took a book from me this evening, a very special book about water magic." He frowned, thinking on how best to tell her the truth. "It wasn't exactly Xander, he was under the influence of... something greater than himself."

"Paul Atreides." She smiled at his shocked expression. "I found my copy yesterday, it was a long read even just refreshing myself. The question is, what did Paul want with the book? Why did he create this storm and what is he planning on doing next? But most importantly, how do we get Xander back?"

"You don't." It pained him to admit it, but Giles knew the truth now. "If he survives the abilities, Paul Atreides is more than enough to keep Xander's body as his own. There is, quite frankly, nothing we can do to interfere with him and at this point, I am not sure I would."

"What in hell is the matter with you? You can't just accept that this character from a book has taken over one of the kids in your charge, Rupert!" Things were taken a change for the surreal. In all her life, training to be the person she had become, she never thought to be in such an insane situation. "We are talking about a fictional being, as in not a real person. He shouldn't exist. We have to find a way to put him back in the book!"

"There is no way!" Pinching his nose, Giles lowered his head and his voice. "I have researched the method used to bring him in to existence. The spell ended with the destruction of the statue on Halloween night. Whatever is causing this is beyond anything I have encountered before."

Jenny thought she was beginning to understand now. "But we can't let it go just because you have never experienced something like this before!"

"That is not the reason at all." Pulling off his glasses, he sat down on the couch across from her. The day's events suddenly coming back to him, Giles felt every moment of his age. "I've researched it thoroughly. Possession spells and charms are very specific in their effects, this is most definitely not one of those."

"So what does that mean?"

"It means that this is Xander, now and forever. The sum total of memories and experiences that make up Xander are but a small part of an infinitely vast mind. He is no longer just Xander, he is also Paul Atreides and every person that came before Paul in his genetic lineage. The direct result of such a blending has left him with more than his mind could handle. In his mind, he is Paul Atreides."
Hat in hand, Whistler stood at the base of a large pillar made of Ice. All around him large crystals of ice grew from the cavern floor, glowing in the darkened cave. Glancing up at the top, he smiled nervously. "Okay, so I am here."

The pillar was silent.

"A little information, please?" He expected something usual, like the images that would fill his mind along with the instant knowledge of the situation. Instead, what he got was silence. "Is there something I've done wrong again?"

"No." Stepping from behind the pillar, a gold and silver skinned woman tossed her steel colored locks. "They are just busy at the moment."

"Great, an oracle." Shaking his head, Whistler put back on his hat. "I don't care what you say, I'm not giving you my hat. It being the only thing of value I have, you can just rot if you want a gift."

"Relax, little demon. I am here to do what the pathetic humans refer to as debrief you." Flauncing her nails, she heaved a moan of displeasure. "get on with it."

"Reguarding Paul Atreides. As was stated in the deal, he was given full use of his abilities in order to stop the big worm thing. He used all his abilities in a spell to summon a great lightening storm. As we expected, his body couldn't handle the strain and went in to shock. Shortly afterwards his system shut down and he died. The worm drown a short time later. It's body is buried in the sand outside the hellmouth and charmed so no one can look for it. Deal done, mission accomplished, the end."

Crossing his arms, Whistler looked at the oracle expectantly. Blowing on her nails, the oracle boredly turned away. "Very well. They would know if you failed and would have taken appropriate actions. Your current assignement is reinstated, find Angel and make sure he works with the slayer to destroy Acathala." Frowning, she waved a hand in front of her nose. "Now go away, you stink."

"Fuck you very much." Flipping her off, he disappeared.

"Ooops, did I forget to mention there is a new Slayer? Must have slipped my mind." Glancing about the chamber, she huffed.

Climbing the steps up the plane ramp, Jenny paused just at the door. Giles was already inside the small charter plane. She wasn't completely sure this was a good idea. Most of their supplies, including all the books and weapons from the library, were on a ship bound for Panama, making her feel defenseless. It was a natural feeling considering the events of the past few days.

They had argued over Xander, Willow, Buffy, responciblity, the hellmouth, other Watchers, and their relationship the rest of the night until early this morning when it had ended in a stalemate. Night had given way to morning and morning brought with it the trip to L.A. for a plane ride to England. Along with their luggage, was a whole trunk load of emotional bagage.

It wasn't that she didn't want to go with Rupert, there were still so many things that needed to be done here. Quite rightly, she felt that they were simply abandoning the city. They had fought the darkness and had held Sunnydale for a time. Now that their best fighter had fallen and another was a casualty, retreat seemed like the best option.
It upset her that she had left without finding what happened with Xander/Paul, but as Giles had said, the boy could handle himself. That still didn't make the situation right. He was yet another reason to fight the darkness now.

The flight attendant stuck her head out the door. Clearing her throat to attract Jenny's attention, she motioned for her to come inside. "The pilot is ready to take off."

"Thank you." Climbing in the craft, she caught site of Giles' expression and smiled in return. She took her seat and buckled up before grabbing his hand in hers. "Remember your promise."

Facing forward, Giles' jaw clenched. "Do not worry, I plan on letting you have the first swing at him when we catch the bastard."

"Good." This time, she smiled genuinely at him. "I still can't believe you ever hung out with an ass like that."

"I was young and stupid. Besides, Ethan sought me out, not the other way around. Don't worry, it won't happen again."

"See that it doesn't."

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Appearing in a garishly decorated bedroom, Whistler cried out in shock. All around him was pink. From the wall hangings, to the slip covers, everything was a different shade of pink. "It's what hell would look like if Barbie was a demon."

"You don't have to convince me." Angel tried to move his body to get off the pink bed, but his legs still refused to respond. "I would get off this bed, but I seem to be a little paralyzed at the moment."

"Tough break, Angel." Snickering, Whistler headed for the bed. Along the way, he stared in horror at the pink dolls surrounding the vampire. "Who did you piss off?"

"Drusilla." Grimacing, Angel pushed them off the bed. "They are supposed to remind me of being a 'good daddy'. Personally, I am feeling about ready to ring her neck next time I see her."

"Sounds fun." Stopping at the bed post, Whistler took in the full sight of Angel, then did a double take. "Pink slacks, pink shirt, pink socks. Well ain't you precious."

Angel frowned. It wasn't funny. "Quit being a smart ass and get me out of here."

"Sorry, bub, no can do. You gotta rest here until either the slayer rescues your cutesy little behind or until you can get yourself out. You know it don't work any other way." Chuckling was his next reaction. It really was too funny to stare at the guy who had been the terror of Europe for over a century. "Speaking of the slayer, where is she?"

"Buffy is dead."

"Not her, the other one. You can't miss her, five-four, got an accent, black." When all he got was a confused expression, Whistler waved it off. "You'll be seeing her soon enough. She's got a destiny to fulfill now that your blonde filly has kicked the bucket."

"Buffy was not a horse!" Growling, Angel grabbed a stuffed animal and threw it at Whistler.

The demon barely had to duck to avoid it. "Now that wasn't so nice, just think of all the trouble
Drusilla went through to get you that nice little rabbit."

"Go away. Now."

Whistler jumped with a screech at the voice just behind his left ear. "What the hell."

"You'll find out soon enough, little demon, if you don't complete a disappearing act very soon."
Drawing his dagger, Paul jabbed at the Balance Demon only to find air. Smirking, Paul replaced the dagger in his belt and strolled over to Angel. "Hello, pink one."

"What the... She is going to pay for that." Running a hand through his spikes, Angel removed the other bows in his hair. "She must have done it while I was unconscious."

"Let me kill him, my lord, it would be a pleasure." Appearing behind Paul's back, an middle aged man with a scar along his jaw line that traced from ear to ear pulled a dagger. "He's not exactly a Harkonnen scum, but I can still enjoy myself."

"Not this one, Gurney man." Paul cocked his head to the side and another man appeared, this one on the other side of the bed. His blue eyes were half hidden behind a mask.

"I see you are still here, demon. Pity." Smiling at Paul, Duncan pulled back his hood. "You are yourself again, my duke?"

"As always." Closing his eyes, he summoned another person.

This time a weathered face of a man in desert colored clothes appeared on the bed, knealing in front of him. Cocking his head to the side, the Fremen examined the vampire. "He is very pale, Mau'dib."

Dark arms slid up around Paul's waist, pulling him back against a woman's chest. She nuzzled her face in to his hair. "Is this really what you have been fighting for, beloved?"

"Xander, what is going on here?" By now, Angel was starting to be a little freaked out by all the suddenly appearing people. When the man in the bed leaned forward, Angel automatically laid back further. "Who are all these people?"

The covers around Angel's waist lifted and warmth slid up his body as a face appeared. Kissing angel below the belly button, Xander grinned up at the vampire. He crawled out from under them, up Angel's body to lay beside him.

Angel noticed that not only was he warm, he was also very naked. "Xander?" He looked between the boy beside him and the almost identical boy standing beside his bed. The only real difference was the eyes. He looked at the boy with blue eyes. "Who are you?"

"Paul Atreides is his name." The old man behind Paul slipped around Paul and stuck the dagger at Angel's throat. "He is magnanimous and generous in the fact that he hasn't killed you yet, you unearthly beast."

"Really? I find him interesting." Othyum reached over Xander and touched Angel's brow. "I have yet to see the like as you in all my years."

"Don't worry, there are plenty others here, Fremen." Folding his arms, Duncan stood glaring at Angel. "I still believe it would be best to kill him and have done with it, Paul."

"Let him live or whatever his kind does." Blowing at the tiny hairs on Paul's neck, Chani grinned.
"It's your decision, Usul, whatever it is you decide."

"I thought I felt spirits." Drusilla let the door finish opening as she coasted in to the room. Glancing from one person to the next she hummed a little. "The dolls cried out in pain. They didn't like being thrown, not at all. What have you been doing, Daddy?"

Duncan pulled out his blade and threw it at the vampire. Before it could hit, however, the blade disappeared.

Drusilla glared at him, shaking her head. "Naughty, spirit."

"Go suck a Harkkonen!" In the next instant, Duncan disappeared.

Rounding on Paul, Drusilla narrowed her eyes. "I don't like being yelled at, especially by invisible people who throw things."

"Then go away." No sooner had Paul spoken, then Drusilla appeared to have vanished. Paul turned his attention back to Angel. Humor gone from his face, he closed his eyes. The people around them soon disappeared as well. Upon opening them again, he glared down at Xander, who was rubbing on Angel.

"What? That is my body you got there, pal. I'm not leaving you to mess this up." He was about to say more when he too vanished.

"We are one being, multiple minds." This time, Paul sat down on the bed. "What I am is not something easily explained. I can do many things that makes many people fear me. To some people, that makes me a god, others I am a demon that should never have been brought in to existance. In my world, after my death, they take very great care not to spawn me again in their breeding program."

"I know, I've finished the series." Cocking his head to the side, Angel watched Paul critically. "You've done things the other couldn't."

"Call me a liberal interpretation. The potential was there, but fareness, and an author's modesty, kept me from becoming the omnipitent being he made me." Paul snapped his fingers and the world around them changed to a cave entrance over looking a vast desert. "Most of my abilities are illusions, tricks of thoughts, but so complete no one would doubt they existed."

"So, I'm still in the bed." Hopping from one foot to the other, Angel reached out to catch himself before he fell over. "Feels real enough."

"It should. This is a place from my memory. If you wish, I can replay it in earnest." Suddenly the world around them exploded in winds as a roar filled the cavern entrance. The ground shook from the roaring, throwing them against the wall.

Angel looked out towards the entrance and saw a great mouth with endless rows of teeth. "The sand worm!"

"Yes." They were back in the calm again. "When my mother came south, this was the cave we first found the Fremen in."

"Why bring me here?" Starting towards the cave, Angel glanced about him. Deeper inside the great cavern, it opened up and plants appeared. "This is beautiful."

"That is why I brought you here." Smiling Paul came up behind him. "That and what it represents. It was here I chose a path that led away from my old ways, my old life. It was here I became Usul, 'the
base of the pillar'. We are here to decide the future in your world, now my world too."

"The future," Angel asked with deep amusement.

"Remember when I told you about the choices you had to make. Fight or die. All the possible futures of yours I saw." Seeing some dawning recognition in Angel's eyes, Paul smiled. "That's good, Dead Boy, now here's the catch. All of those are still possible, only now is the time in which one stops being a possiblity."

"Door number one?" A cave off to their right lit up. "Door number two." A cave to their left lit up. "Or door number three." The cave ahead of them lit up. "Come on, Angel, let's make a deal. Your choice is rather simple really. The first one takes you to a future where your's truly disappears from your life forever, a great shame really. Door number two leads to a future where we are together on occaision, but only as aquaitances."

Paul walked towards the third one. "Number three, we wake up in bed together every evening. Personally, I like door number three." Stopping just at the entrance, Paul crossed his arms. "What will it be?"

"What happens if I chose door number one?" Angel smirked at Paul's frown.

"You die."

Now was Angel's turn to frown. "Door number two?"

Smirking, Paul cocked his head. "You die."

"Door three?" Angel thought this would prove if the boy was lying to him.

"You die." Paul's expression changed to that of a resigned fate. "But you have a hell of a time getting there. Face it, Angel, you are going to die eventually, we all do. The only difference is how you get there and who with."

"So really, the only choice you are offering is your level of involvement in my life." Seeing Paul nod, Angel glanced about the cavern again. "Do I have to make the choice now?"

"Door number four it is."

Suddenly, Angel was back in the bedroom, Drusilla standing there looking at him with fear. He looked all about him for Paul, but found the room other wise empty. "Is this because I asked for more time?"

"Could be." A flash of light and Paul appeared beside him again, this time laying on the bed. "Then again, it could just be because I was never really here. In fact, as of this moment, my body is being carried out of a car and in to the city morgue." Rolling on to his back, Paul stretched out flat. "Don't worry, they'll only get as far as declaring me dead before I cut the charade."

"Why are you doing this? What is going on, Xander?" Angel was shocked when the boy's eyes bled back to the normal brown.

"I'm the one with the power now, Dead Boy. I figured I would dick with you until you got angry. As for the dead thing, that is for the benefit of those Morons That Be. Seems they don't like the fact I can know things they don't want others to. I bring a new level to the playing field they've held exclusively for countless mellinia." Smirking, Paul let his eyes return to their blue. He giggled and forced his body not tense. "This guy has cold fingers."
"What guy?" Angel glanced about Paul for any sign of another person. When he blinked, he was standing in a sterile room with Paul laying on a metal table being examined by a man in a blue coat. "Your autopsy?"

"First stages. He won't get passed that, at least not on a first date." Turning his head, he smiled at Angel. When the man lifted his arm, Paul flexed his fingers, causing the man to drop it in fright. "This guy is so easy."

Angel had to fight to keep a smile off his face. "What happens when they find your body missing from the morgue?"

"They won't. I will make them all see what they expect to see, a body." When the man dared to come close again, Paul turned his head and held open his mouth. The man placed a finger in his mouth and checked the throat for obstructions. When he was through, Paul turned and spit to clean his throat. "That was rather unpleasant. Hate the taste of rubber gloves."

"What are we going to do?" Angel sighed when he was once again in the bedroom.

"Just hang tight. I am almost through in the morgue. When I am, I will come get you and we will get the hell out of Sunnydale." Winking, Paul disappeared in a flash. His disembodied voice drifted through the room. "Until then, just grin and bare it."

"Grin and bare it?" Angel looked up at the sound of a rubber glove snapping. For the first time in his long undead existence, he knew fear. "Dru, what are you playing at?"

"I wanna play Doctor." Pulling up her cotton mask, she grinned at Angel. "Now turn your head and cough for Dr. Drusilla."

Willow sat back in her Taxi with a huff. November in New York was the equivalent of hell on earth in her opinion. So many people jammed in to so little space and so damned cold it made the hair on her arms ache. The first thing she did when stepping out of the busy airport was fall on her ass. It wasn't a pleasant beginning and it had only gone down hill from there.

Her aunt and uncle had been pleasant enough, if you could ignore the deafening accent of her aunt and the old fashioned ideas of her uncle. He had taken one look her and said "eh, you could may be use a little less make up." Her aunt had just squealed for a half hour and fretted over her hair. A word her aunt had used, not her. "Fretting over my favorite niece!"

Already she was less sure it was a good idea so much as a punishment for her part in Buffy's death. If it was Karma, then she would simply nod and go on with life until she had paid her debt. At least in New York, she would have an interesting time of it. Laying her head back against the head rest, she thought she saw a reflection of something flying over head in the glass. When she looked towards it, it was already gone. "What was that?"

"What was what?" Seeing Willow looking up, the cabbie snorted in disgust. "God damned web crawling freak."

"Web crawling?" Willow searched the sky for a giant spider. What she saw instead was an impressive male form swinging around on a rope. When he spread his legs to do a roll, she saw how impressive he really was. "Oh, oh my." Her cheeks flamed red as she sat back in her seat like a good girl.

Yep, New York was going to be interesting.
Paul grinned over his shoulder at the cursing Angel. He had bundled the vampire up in the pink blankets and thrown him in the back seat. "Ah quit your bitching, Dead Boy, at least I got you out of there before she got to the lubrication part."

"Lubrication," Angel squeaked.

"Don't ask." Adjusting his mirrors, Paul let his Xander persona take hold and do the driving. Wind blowing in his hair, this was the closest to heaven Xander ever wanted to come. If what he could see was coming, then it would be a long while before he felt so free again. In the mean while, he intended to do his best to get Angel to make his choice. The only real choice. Door number three.

On the edge of Sunnydale, a lone figure stepped out of the back of a limosine. Adjusting his jacket, he grinned. The sun was coming up, the town was free of slayers, his last obstical to being defeated had just left town, and to top it off, it looked like another beautiful day in the town he had created. "Yes, sir, a fine day to be alive."

Suddenly the earth beneath his feet shook. Catching his balance, he let the grin slip a little. When it had passed, he stood up straight again. "Just a little unsettling." He turned to face the town. "Such a pretty sight." The ground shook again.

Sniffing the air, the Mayor smiled brightly. "Is someone chewing that new cinnamon flavored gum?"

The ground exploded in a hellish rain of sand.

THE END..........................

End Notes

I claim no ownership of Dune or Buffy: The Vampire Slayer.

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